

All that is Rare

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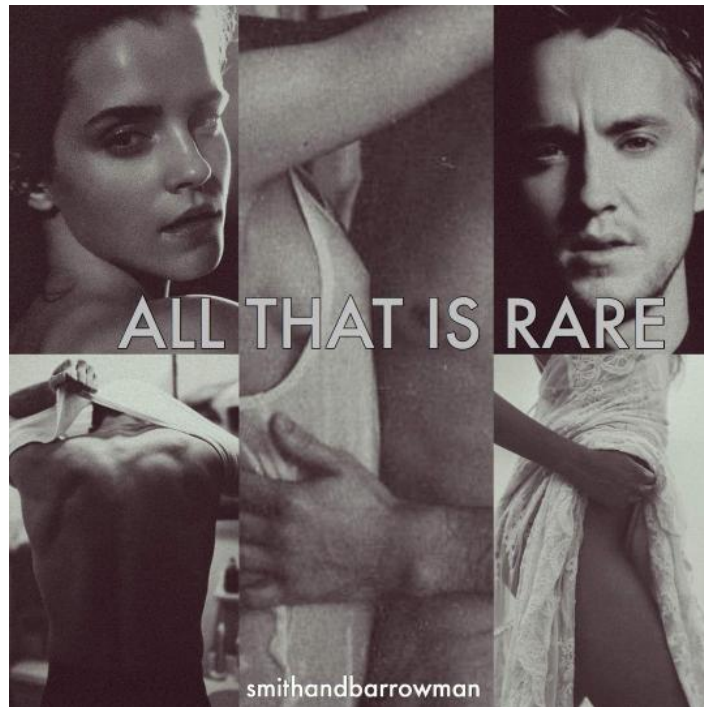
by [smithandbarrowman](#)

Summary

In the wizarding world, it has long been assumed that men are Alphas and women are Omegas. However, when Hermione Granger discovers that assumptions are rarely factual, her status as one of only a handful of female alphas that has ever existed has men falling at her feet.

But there's only one man she wants, and like the male alphas before her, the hunt is on until he bears her mark.

Chapter 1



*“In the end it must be as it is and always has been:
great things remain for the great, abysses for the profound,
nuances and shudders for the refined, and, in brief,
all that is rare for the rare.”*

Friedrich Nietzsche

Hermione Granger couldn't concentrate on anything — a haze of fog was clouding her brain and had been doing so for days. The words on the parchment in front of her blurred as she struggled to focus, and the voices outside her office sounded something akin to being underwater.

She shook her head but the fog remained.

She'd celebrated Ginny's birthday over the weekend — twenty-one deserved a huge celebration according to her friend — but it was now Wednesday and hangovers didn't usually last quite that long.

And her clouded brain wasn't the only issue.

For weeks, muscle spasms and tremors had been wracking her body; her heart would race randomly for minutes, and at times she felt like she couldn't breathe. She didn't feel ill — she felt heavy, uneasy, like a ball of lead was weighing her down.

And then there were the dreams.

Dreams she could never quite recall woke her, whimpering and curled into a ball.

Her healer had been brushing her symptoms off, telling Hermione simply that she worked too hard and needed some time off. Hermione finally convinced her to prescribe a sleeping draught and the healer sent her away with a mild one. But it hadn't helped. In fact, the potion had made matters worse.

She had woken that very morning, after having slept deeply for the first time in weeks, actually able to recall her dream. And it was a dream like no other she'd ever had.

A hulking, naked male lay beneath her while she languidly moved over him.

Muscles toned to perfection.

Strong hands on her hips.

The feeling of being filled like never before.

A sense of power — of ownership — over him that he couldn't fight.

The images and feelings had been so vivid that when she awoke, it was with a desperate cry and an overwhelming ache she couldn't seem to soothe.

She leaned on her desk, her head in her hands — the pounding intensifying with each passing minute — and groaned. She was Hermione Granger. And Hermione Granger never got sick. The Pepper-Up Potion she'd taken had made no difference, and the aspirin was even less effective.

But she didn't have time to be sick.

She'd left the monotony that was the Ministry a year ago, much to everyone's surprise. But the life of a politician, the life she thought she wanted, turned out to be dull and tedious, and laws that should've been simple and easy to implement took forever to even be considered.

Her new rare and collectible book shop was finally giving the long established shops a run for their money and days off weren't an option. In the last two months, the shop had begun to become a success and the sudden interest in her enterprise left little time for a life away from work. And she'd only recently been able to employ someone to help out. Hannah Abbott had been a godsend. Her knowledge of books was as in-depth as Hermione's and the pair had become an efficient team. And she never would have thought it, but at just twenty-three, Hermione had achieved her dream.

But also at just twenty-three, she was exhausted.

With grim determination, Hermione pulled the parchment towards her, concentrating furiously on the words written on it. It was one thing she excelled at — ignoring everything but the task at hand. But as hard as she tried, the words still seemed to swim across the page.

She groaned in frustration and thumped her head onto her desk.

What was happening to her?

"I'm guessing lunch is not happening today. You look like hell," Ron chuckled as he entered her office. "You need a few days off."

Hermione's head whipped up at the sound of her friend's voice, scowling at his ridiculous grin.

"Still recovering from the weekend then?" He laughed and the sound grated on her nerves.

"Shut up, Ron," Hermione snapped. "You drink so much you're probably never sober. I don't know why Daph puts up with you."

"Hey now," Ron was startled at her tone and insinuation. "I'm too busy with the Aurors to drink that much. And I wouldn't anyway, you know that."

"Sorry," Hermione mumbled, but even to her own ears, her apology sounded hollow. "I'm not sure what's wrong with me. I've not felt well for... actually a while now."

Ron sat in the chair opposite her and smiled. "You work too hard, you always have. There's nothing wrong with taking a few days off."

"That's what my Healer said."

"Maybe I should have been a Healer," Ron grinned at her and leaned forward in his chair.

Hermione instantly sat up, pressing back into her own chair. An odour that almost made her choke suddenly surrounded her and she slapped her hand over her mouth and nose in an attempt to stem the acrid smell.

“Hermione,” Ron began, looking alarmed. “Are you okay?”

She shook her head, swallowing hard. The odour was flowing off him in waves, and the foul stench was so strong, she had to close her eyes.

The smell reminded her of burned and rotting flesh. Like the aftermath of the Battle of Hogwarts.

Her stomach lurched and she bolted for the bathroom, dropping to her knees and vomiting a thin, watery gruel into the toilet.

“Shit, Hermione,” Ron stood in the doorway staring wide-eyed at her.

She lifted her head to look at him and the stench hit her again. Her head dropped down and her hair fell around her face like a veil. Her stomach rolled and she gagged, but nothing followed.

“Hey,” Ron said gently as he squatted beside her, his hand coming to rest on her back. “I think you should go home.”

Hermione’s throat clicked and she gagged again — he was too close and the odour swirling around him was bringing tears to her eyes. She reached out and shoved at him. “You need to leave.”

“It’s fine. I’ve seen worse than someone chucking up.” He ran his hand across her back in what she assumed was supposed to be a soothing manner. But all it did was anger her.

“Get. Away. From. Me.” She snapped her head towards him and snarled. “*Now* .”

Ron’s grin dropped and his face paled at the growl of her voice. He stood and held his hands up, slowly backing away. “Hermione, what’s—”

“Fuck off, Ron!” Hermione screamed the words and Ron almost toppled backwards as he scrambled away.

“I’ll get Hannah,” Ron called and she heard his hurried footsteps, then the door of her office slammed shut.

Hermione rolled back on her heels and leaned against the wall, pressing the heels of her hands against her eyes, then hesitated. She took a deep breath; the nauseating smell wasn’t as strong now that he’d left the room.

What the hell was going on?

Why on earth did her friend smell so vile? And why did Hannah not smell him when he came in and kick him out of the shop?

“Fucking hell,” she groaned and leaned her head back against the wall.

“Hermione?” Hannah sounded cautious. “Ron said you were sick.”

“Any wonder,” Hermione looked up at her. “How could you stand it?”

Hannah’s brow creased, “Stand what?”

“The stench,” Hermione grimaced, “He smells like death.”

“No...” Hannah shook her head in confusion. “...he really doesn’t.”

Hermione sniffed the air — a lingering scent still remained. “Is he by the door?”

Hannah glanced over her shoulder, frowned, and then returned her gaze to Hermione. “Yeah. How did you know?”

“He smells like death, like rotting flesh.” Hannah winced as Hermione dragged herself to her feet. “Ron, you really need to leave. Please.”

“Are you okay?” he called. “I’m worried.”

“Just give me a day or two to figure out what’s wrong. I’m sure I’ll be fine,” Hermione called back. “Sorry I screamed at you.”

She heard him laugh. “It was no worse than usual. Let me know if you need anything.”

She pressed her fist to her mouth as another wave of the god-awful stench swirled across the room as he left. She looked at Hannah, who wasn’t reacting at all. “How can you not smell it?”

The bell chimed over the door indicating Ron had left. Hermione took a deep breath and let out a huge sigh of relief.

“Maybe it’s...” Hannah placed the palm of one hand over Hermione’s forehead, making her huff out a laugh.

“What are you doing?”

Hannah hushed her and wrapped the fingers of her other hand around Hermione’s wrist, feeling for a pulse. “You’re not too warm and your pulse is fine. I don’t know what it is. Did someone hex you on the weekend?”

Hermione shook her head. “I don’t think so, but it certainly feels like it.”

“Go home. And stay there tomorrow as well,” Hannah told her. “In fact, stay home for the rest of the week. I’ll get Ginny to help out here. The Harpies are out of season, so she’s got plenty of free time.”

Hermione was about to protest, but the expression on Hannah’s face told her she looked as bad as she felt.

“Fine,” she said, defeated. “But if anything happens—“

“Yes, yes.” Hannah reached out and grasped both of Hermione’s shoulders. “You’ll be the first to know. Go home. Rest. Don’t come back until Monday.”

Hermione stepped out of the floo into her living room and instinctively sniffed the air. A sharp tremor ran through her; a faint aroma that held a certain familiarity — but which she never noticed before — hung in the air. It smelled of Harry, with an underlying scent of Pansy. Ron may have told them already of what happened, but neither of her friends was in her living room — and it had been more than a week since they’d last visited — making the scent yet another anomaly that was confusing.

She lifted her hand, whispered *Homenum Revelio* , and waited. She wasn’t as paranoid as some — the war had made some half-bloods and muggleborns overly cautious — but she did protect her flat with wards and charms to allow access to only those whom she approved. Her friends were welcome, of course, but they had never been in her home without her present.

She sniffed the air again, glancing around, but the charm had revealed nothing.

Waving her hand in a quick circle, Hermione cast a cleansing charm and then dropped her bag at her feet as the magic rid her flat of the odours. She shrugged off her jacket and dragged her hands through her unruly curls, pressing her fingers hard into her scalp in an attempt to squeeze the pounding out of her head, and took a step towards the couch. But as her foot landed on the floor, her legs gave out and she collapsed in a heap on the carpet with a surprised yelp.

Something was wrong.

She tried to push herself up, but a heavy weight seemed to be pushing her back down. This was insane. She didn’t feel ill, despite her vomiting, and Hannah pressing her hand to Hermione’s forehead ruled out a fever. And now that she was away from Ron, the acrid burning, rotting stench was gone.

Something was definitely wrong.

Hermione tried once more to lift herself from the floor but what little strength she had completely abandoned her. Her arms shook and buckled, and she hit the floor again.. She groaned, part in frustration, part because her body had begun to ache, and it was an ache that she was becoming all too familiar with. Her nipples tightened and her core clenched, and she craved nothing more than the need to feel the naked body of the man who was haunting her dreams beneath her.

And the fear of her craving a complete stranger gripped her so tightly she found it hard to breathe.

A whimper escaped her throat; the desire rising within her was almost unbearable. Never before had she ever experienced the raw need she felt both in her dreams and upon waking.

Never before had she actually even been intimate with a man.

She and Ron were hardly together long enough to do anything more than share a few teenage kisses. And she'd not found anyone since that even piqued her interest. But now, her nights had become a series of the most erotic dreams imaginable. Her mornings had found her waking with a sudden urgency, gasping for a release she had no idea how to find.

And the face in those dreams...

It was a blur, but she somehow knew him. He felt familiar, he also felt oh so dangerous. But the fact that the faceless man who had become an almost nightly feature in her subconscious and brought about an unrelenting desire of which she truly had no knowledge, confounded her.

Hermione closed her eyes, trying to quell her rising temperature. She squeezed her thighs together tightly and rocked back and forth slowly — an instinct that she never knew existed within her. She lifted one heavy hand to her throat, tugged the open collar of her shirt, and traced her fingers over the swell of her breast. She could feel her heart racing, the quickening *thump-thump-thump* loud in her ears as the heat inside her grew.

She gasped. Her skin was damp, her body shuddering, and the image of *him* flashed through her mind. She cried out — a tiny flash of an unknown pleasure shot through her — and her eyes flew open, half expecting to see her mysterious stranger in the room with her.

And then everything subsided, ending as quickly as it had begun.

She rolled onto her back and stared up at the ceiling until her breathing eased. *What the fuck was going on?*

Getting up off the floor took an almost monumental effort and, walking to the kitchen, her legs felt like lead. She poured herself a glass of water, drinking it slowly, replaying Hannah's question in her head — *Did someone hex you on the weekend?*

It *was* possible, she supposed, but she knew what was happening wasn't caused by a hex — the after-effects of a hex would have worn off in days. Besides, her symptoms, if that's even what they were, had been going on for weeks. And no books or healers had been able to offer any explanation as to what she was experiencing.

She swallowed the last of her water and headed for the stairs — too terrified to Apparate in her current state — and she caught sight of herself in the mirror in the hallway. Her face was flushed, cheeks streaked with pink. Her hair was a mess, but rather than it's usual unruly state, it had a look of having been... shagged soundly.

But her eyes... they were like nothing she had ever seen.

The warm, dark brown that she usually saw in her reflection was gone, and a rich, golden hue stared back at her. She was startled at the vast difference, yet she was captivated by the oddity. She couldn't recall a time her eyes had ever looked lighter — even in the brightest daylight her eyes never changed.

She leaned closer to the mirror, as if that would change the state of her eyes, but they remained the same.

“What the fuck...?” Hermione murmured to her reflection and then stood staring idiotically, waiting for a response. Frowning at her own thoughts — and her unanswering reflection — she turned and resumed her trek up the stairs. A shower was what she needed to soothe her body and clear her head.

Starting the water, she stripped off while it warmed and ran her hand unconsciously over her forearm, not glancing down to the word she was so accustomed to seeing. She knew she would never rid herself of it, and as hard as she'd tried, she had yet to break the habit of trying.

Another shot of heat rocked through her body, smaller this time but nonetheless intense. She winced and pressed her hand to her stomach, breathing deeply and waiting for the sensation to pass.

Hermione ducked her head under the water and closed her eyes when she stepped into the shower. The sound of the falling water seemed louder in her ears, as if she could hear each drop as it hit the tiles — a heavy *plop* followed by a lighter splash as the drops broke apart on impact. Even the steam seemed to have its own resonance as it mingled with the cool air.

She squeezed her eyes shut tighter, willing the sounds away. But her action only seemed to heighten her awareness. The birds outside. The sound of the wind in the trees. The voices of her neighbours as they walked past.

She put her fingers in her ears, and the sounds dimmed somewhat. But the lack of sight and sound only intensified the feel of the water on her skin.

She wanted to cry — exhaustion and confusion were an almost suffocating mix — but her tears refused to flow. Why she could suddenly feel, see, smell, and hear more of everything around her wasn't making any sense.

The images in her dreams were insane, and the feelings they caused were even more so.

The heightened awareness of everything around her was absurd.

The odours she never had even noticed, yet could now smell with a clarity that overwhelmed her.

The soothing touch of her childhood friend brought on an anger that was inexplicable.

And her eyes...

Her senses were in overload, and there was no understandable reason as to why.

All she knew was that something was definitely wrong.

Very, very wrong.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Large fingers travelled slowly down her ribs, gently exploring the dips and curves of her stomach and hips. She didn't think the touch of another's hand — so gentle, so light — could bring about so quickly the liquid heat which had settled between her thighs.

“Your skin is like silk.”

The low tenor of his voice was comforting as it wrapped around her, smooth and soft, luxurious and warm, but there was a power in the deep tones.

The body beside her moved in closer still and pressed flush against her side, setting every nerve inside her aflame.

“I want to worship you,” the deep voice whispered against the shell of her ear. “I want to press my lips to every inch of your skin. I want to make love to you and draw out your passion like never before.”

His leg curled over hers, the heavy weight of his chest pressed against the softness of her breast. Warm puffs of his breath fluttered against the side of her throat, his arousal — large and heavy — twitched against her hip.

After what seemed like an eternity, his fingers stopped and she felt the wet brush of his lips against her nipple. She gasped, his tongue licking circles around it, waking the long-dormant desire inside her. He murmured her name as his teeth closed over the tight bud, and her hand dropped to lay against his lower abdomen, excruciatingly close to his rock-hard erection.

“Don't tease me, darling,” he purred. “If you want to touch me—“ he took her hand and pressed it against his erection, “—touch me.”

Her fingers instinctively wrapped around him and she wondered at the enormous size of him. Wondered if all men were this big — at least, what she thought of as big, she'd not experienced anything like this with the opposite sex.

“Hmm,” he murmured, moving his mouth back to her ear. “You're still teasing me.”

“No,” she whispered. “I've never...”

“Tell me, darling. You've never... teased? You've never... touched?”

“Never...”

He placed his hand over hers and squeezed, sliding her delicate fingers up and then back down his length. “Do you like how I feel?”

She nodded and whispered a breathy *yeah* .

His hand left hers and resumed its soft strokes across her stomach, moving slowly lower with each pass. Her hand stuttered on his length as his fingers finally dipped to touch the damp curls between her thighs and she heard the quiet rumble of his chuckle. “Harder, darling. I won’t break.”

She took a shaky breath — not realising her own hand had stopped moving — and did as he’d asked, squeezing him tightly once more. She closed her eyes, trying to relax, waiting for that first touch of his fingers against her most intimate place that had yet to be explored by another.

The hand stroking her curls drifted away, slipping down the inside of her thigh and pushed gently, opening her to him. She felt the rush of heat flame her cheeks — she’d never felt more exposed, more vulnerable.

“You are beautiful, darling.” His voice dripped with honey and his fingers found the throbbing nub that she ached to have caressed. He pressed his face to the side of her throat, murmuring, “And your scent is like a drug.”

There was nothing tentative about his touch — he knew how to rub, how to tease — and the soft moan that escaped her was so full of desperation she startled herself.

Her leg dropped to the side — all her inhibitions disappearing at his perfect touch. His strong hand cupped her, the heel of his palm rubbing at her, arousing her to the point where she was starting to lose the ability to think.

She could feel herself trembling. Her hand gripped his arm, fingernails digging into the hard muscles, and a tight cry tore from her throat.

“Let yourself fall, darling. I’ll catch you. I’ll always catch you.”

She stared up into his eyes, a thousand hues of blue and grey stared back at her.

His fingers slipped inside her.

And with a gasp, she fell.

Hermione woke with a fierce cry. Her back was a sharp arc, her muscles tense, her nerves alight. One hand was between her thighs, her fingers penetrating her body. The other was on her breast, pinching hard at her tight nipple.

Another choked cry left her and she collapsed onto the mattress as her body — she was sure — shattered into a thousand pieces. Brilliant sparks of light flashed behind her closed eyes.

She was panting and trembling, her body was covered in sweat, her sleep shorts and singlet were twisted and clinging to her body.

She wrenched her hands from her body, gripping the tangled sheet, horrified at her unconscious self-gratification. She rarely indulged herself; just the thought made her squirm uncomfortably. It had really only been the last few weeks that she had begun to... experiment.

And the intensity of this particular dream shocked her. Never in her short life had she dreamt such things. The dreams she'd had in the past few weeks had certainly grown steadily in their vividness, but this one had felt almost real. The feel of his fingers, the scent of his skin — a scent which she was almost certain was now soaked into her sheets, into her own skin — and the depth of blue in his eyes was like nothing she'd known but felt oddly familiar at the same time.

But the most peculiar thing was that it was *him* every time. The same man, the same stranger. But Hermione knew it shouldn't have been possible — dreams weren't like that.

Dreams were a part of your subconscious, they were memories of people and places you already knew. They weren't random imaginings of unknown naked men who brought you to orgasm while you slept. Her logical brain understood that.

But the fact that this man — this beautiful, blue-eyed man — was a near-nightly visitor in her sleeping mind, was just another anomaly in the madness that had caused nothing but confusion in her life.

Hermione finally opened her eyes and stared at the ceiling. Who *was* this man haunting her dreams?

The blue-grey storm that had stared down at her right before she fell had been the first time in her dream-state that she'd been afforded a glimpse of any of his features. He'd never been recognisable, her unconscious mind had not given her the privilege of seeing anything more than the blurred outline of his face. But it was without a doubt that she somehow knew him.

And despite her inexperience in such things, there was a certain familiarity in his touch, his words, the feel of his kiss on her skin. She knew it was only for her.

She knew *he* was only for her.

However, the frustration of knowing this man, but of him being just out of her reach, was something that was becoming harder and harder to shake. Ron had blue eyes, but Ron also stank of death. She couldn't imagine a scenario where the malodorous smell of her school friend would ever be attractive.

Harry also had blue eyes...

She shook her head, and berated herself; *Harry has green eyes. Hermione, you really are going insane* .

Besides, he was her best friend, and she'd never even considered him to be anything more. Also, he was engaged to Pansy. A woman who would kill her if she even thought Hermione was lusting after her fiancé .

Rolling to her stomach with a heavy groan, she starfished across her bed and closing her eyes, wondered...

What would he be like, her dream stranger? Soft and tender? Rough and hard? Would his voice purr in her ear and drive her to the brink? Would he be gentle with her the first time when he learned of her... inexperience? Or would he tear through her like some wild animal claiming a prize?

And what *would* it feel like to have him push inside her, to feel the weight of him on top of her? Or — as in so many of her dreams — to watch him beneath her? It would hurt, she was sure, but if her dreams were anything to go by, it would be a pleasure-pain that would definitely leave her sated and wanting more.

She huffed out a laugh, catching herself. She could fantasise and dream all she liked. She had no idea what it was like to be so intimate with a man. She'd never once even been close.

She'd been subjected to Pansy and Ginny's conversations on the matter too many times to count, but Hermione wasn't entirely sure if they knew the truth. She wasn't a prude, nor was she waiting for 'the one'. She'd been on a few dates in the years since she'd finished school, but nothing had ever clicked with any of them. So she had allowed her friends to assume what they liked and had never corrected them.

Yes, she'd fantasised on more than one occasion as to what she thought she might want when it came to men, but those fantasies were demure and a little Austenesque in comparison to the salacious dreams of recent weeks.

And after waking as she just had, it occurred to her that the man in those dreams was exactly who she wanted.

His hulking frame — flawless skin stretched across a broad chest with toned muscles that seemed unnaturally perfect — made her feel so small and delicate, yet feminine and powerful. A man who seemed to know what she needed, who took his own pleasure in that knowledge, and who would undoubtedly know how to make her body his own.

"Nice, Hermione," she berated herself. "You're fantasising about a ghost in your dreams. You truly have gone mad."

She laughed, "And you're talking to yourself again. *Great*."

The *whooshing* of the floo sounded, then a slight pause, followed by Harry's voice calling for her.

"Hermione, are you here?"

She sighed heavily — her body finally having cooled from the heat of her dream — and dragged herself out of bed.

“One minute,” she called back.

“Take your time, I’ll make tea.”

Hermione smiled; Harry was an angel. Ron had clearly told him what had happened, and now her friend was here to check on her.

She picked up her fleece jumper, pulled it on over her head, and hastily wrangled her hair into a loose ponytail. A quick glance in the mirror told her that her eyes had returned to normal, the golden hue thankfully gone. She was excited to see her friend, but she knew he would have noticed the change immediately — one’s eyes didn’t change colour at will.

She was also excited to see him because she hadn’t in weeks — not alone, at any rate. Harry had been so busy planning his wedding to Pansy, and because Hermione had been so busy herself, she’d had no real time with him. So this would be nice, just the two of them, talking like they always had. She missed it.

Padding barefoot down the stairs, Hermione abruptly stopped halfway when the same acrid stench she smelled on Ron the previous day hit her. She slapped her hand over her mouth and nose and groaned. *Not Harry too.*

Hermione swallowed heavily and dragged a deep breath through her palm, holding the air in her lungs and calling, “Harry? Are you on your own?”

“No, Ron’s here as well.” Harry called back and then laughed. “He was too scared to say anything.”

Hermione covered her mouth and nose again, and would have laughed as both her friends appeared in the doorway looking sheepish, if not for the foul odour.

“Ron, you can’t be here. You have to go,” she groaned, her voice muffled by her hand. “It’s... I don’t know what it is, but it’s bad.”

Harry frowned. “What’s bad?”

“He stinks,” Hermione shot Ron an apologetic look. “It’s like rotting flesh.”

Harry glanced at Ron and leaned slowly towards him, sniffing audibly. “He smells normal to me... well, as normal as Ron usually smells.”

“Fuck off,” Ron punched Harry’s arm and looked worriedly at Hermione. “You can still smell it?”

“Yeah.” She nodded, “Sorry, Ron.”

“What about Harry? Does he smell the same?”

Hermione shrugged, “I can’t tell with you here.”

“Okay. I’m pretty sure he’ll smell worse, but I’ll go outside.” Ron ducked and laughed as Harry took a swing at him, and headed for the back door.

Hermione waited until she heard the click of the latch and slowly removed her hand from her face. The odour was still in the air, but not as strong, and she breathed a sigh of relief. Harry was fine — a faint smell of cinnamon and Pansy’s perfume, but nothing like the eye-watering aroma that surrounded Ron.

She came down the stairs and hugged Harry, then looked out the window to see Ron standing in the middle of her garden, looking hopeful that Harry would be sent out with him.

“I don’t have the heart to tell him, can you, please?”

Harry nodded and headed down the hallway. He opened the door with a grin, “It’s only you, mate. You smell like death, whereas I smell like a bouquet of roses.”

Ron flipped his middle finger at him. “Hermione, are you okay? *Really* okay?”

“I don’t know,” she called, not daring to move any closer to the ajar door. “Sorry.”

“You need to go to the hospital,” Ron’s hopeful expression had changed and his face was now coloured with concern. “Find out what’s going on and let me know, okay?”

Hermione nodded and watched glumly as Ron disappeared with a pop.

“What’s going on?” Harry gripped her shoulder as she stared out at where Ron had been standing.

“I don’t know, Harry. Everything around me seems...” she shrugged, “seems... more.”

“More? How?”

“I don’t know. I can smell things, hear things. It’s like I’m aware of everything around me on a whole new level. It’s odd and confusing.” She sighed, and felt tears welling up in her eyes. “And poor Ron. I threw up when I smelled him. And then screamed at him.”

“He’ll get over it,” Harry chuckled and wrapped his arm around her shoulders. “But we need to sort out what’s happening. I’ll take you to St. Mungos.”

“I’ve been several times in the last few months and they don’t know what it is,” she admitted. “My Healer says I work too hard and am just stressed.”

“That’s probably true.” Harry squeezed her shoulders and kissed her temple. “And maybe Ron has always smelled bad, we just didn’t notice.”

Hermione giggled, “Don’t say that.”

“Why not? It’s probably true.”

“Harry!” Hermione laughed. “It’s mean. He feels awful and he’s done nothing wrong.”

Harry laughed with her and then dragged her into the kitchen, telling her to sit before handing her the tea he had made. “If Ron smells like death, what do I smell like?”

“Smoky, kind of like cinnamon,” Hermione said. “And I assume Pansy stayed over last night? I thought you two weren’t living together until after you’re married.”

Harry’s face turned crimson and his eyes grew wide. “What... how...?”

Hermione shrugged, “It’s what I can smell.”

“Hermione,” Harry looked thunderstruck, “How can you smell... *that*?”

“I told you, Harry, everything in the last few months has been... *more*.” She sipped her tea and shrugged again, “Everyone around me seems to have a distinct smell. I can hear individual drops of water, and I can sense a storm coming long before it rains. I can even hear the voice of one particular person in a crowd if I concentrate hard enough. I don’t know what’s happening, or why, and nothing I’ve read tells me anything.”

“You can smell people and hear water and sense storms?”

Hermione nodded. “Weird, right?”

“You’re not some kind of Animagus, are you?” Harry frowned, “Because those sound like some serious animal traits.”

Hermione stared at him, her tea cup freezing part way to her mouth. “What?” she whispered.

“We’ve dealt with a few Animagi in the Auror Department and a keen sense of smell, and heightened hearing? That sounds like wolf traits to me.” His frown dropped and his lips twitched, “But... they do say elephants can predict the weather.”

Hermione rolled her eyes, but her mind was spinning. *An Animagus. Was it possible?*

It made sense. Sound, smell, that tingling feeling she got in the hours before it rained. She knew that some animals were capable of it all.

But...

It didn’t explain her dreams. Or the intense heat that rocked her body and had her orgasming in her sleep. And it certainly didn’t explain the lust — the pure desire — she felt for an unknown stranger who haunted those dreams.

“...you could be,” Harry was saying. “I mean, you’re smart and your memory is amazing. Elephants are the same.”

“I’m not an Animagus, Harry.” Hermione shot him an annoyed look, “And certainly not an elephant. The spell to transform is far too difficult and in any case, I have no idea how to

perform it. *And* I'm sure if I was one, I would have known long before now. Besides, if anyone was to be an Animagus, it would be you. Your father was one, after all."

"True," Harry agreed. "But give me some credit here, it was a fair guess."

"Yeah, okay," Hermione relented, "Good point. But Sirius never said he had heightened senses like this. I mean, he may have had some and never told us, but..."

"Hermione?"

"*Oh, fuck.*" Her eyes grew wide. "Oh. My... *Fuck . Animals.* How did I miss it?"

"Miss *what* ?"

"I think I know..." All the colour drained from her face.

"Hermione, calm down." Harry reached out and touched her arm, "Tell me what you think it is?"

"I can't be... I'm not..." She stood quickly, knocking her chair over. "Harry, I have to... library..."

"Herm—" Harry watched her run from the room, a concerned frown creasing his forehead, and not understanding what she meant when she muttered *Omega*.

Chapter End Notes

So many of you have asked for an update schedule on this. I can only say at this stage it will be on Fridays, but I can't say that as a definite promise, as sometimes real life gets in the way of writing.

Chapter 3

'In a hierarchical society, an Omega is considered the lowest caste... An Omega is subordinate to all others and is also expected to remain submissive to the Alpha who chooses them.... Alphas and Omegas have only ever been found amongst the purest wizarding blood...'

Hermione thumped her head on the desk for the thousandth time.

Omega .

She'd been scouring book after book for hours, but none of the descriptions of Omegas came close to what she was experiencing. The descriptions of *heats* were different than what she was feeling, and Omegas couldn't smell or hear in the way she could. There was no mention of explicit dreams, and she definitely wasn't of *pure wizarding blood*.

And the descriptions repulsed her. *Submissive. Subordinate. Below all others.* She'd probably *Avada* herself if she found the information to be true.

She knew for sure her being an Animagus was out of the question, but a vague recollection of a pureblood rarity set off an alarm inside her head when Harry suggested the animal traits aspect.

Reading unhindered in the Restricted Section of the library during her eighth year, she'd been disgusted at the old Wizarding societies and clubs. She had almost thrown an ancient tome across the room when she happened across the expectations of those beneath the top rung of society. Omegas were the lowest of the low. And they were expected to bow to every whim of those above them.

She'd forgotten the book almost as soon as she'd re-shelved it in disgust.

But the word, *Omega*, had been one that seemed to stick in her subconscious. *Submissive. Subordinate. Below all others.* Just the thought of those words gave her chills. She was none of those things.

She was intelligent, confident, a leader. She wasn't one to allow inequality, and she certainly didn't think anyone beneath her. And while she hated it, she knew people looked up to her, admired her, considered her the brightest witch of her age. None of it screamed *Omega* .

Hermione sighed and reached for the last book on the table. It was thin and she held little hope of it giving her any information at all. The subject of Omegas in civilised conversation seemed to be almost taboo — and after reading about the heats and sexual desires, she understood why. And, she guessed, since Omegas were so rare, they were never spoken about. The books she'd already read had all said the same, so a book that was barely twenty-five pages long was sure to be a disappointment.

She looked at the cover — *Alpha/Beta/Omega Pairings* — and groaned. In her mind, the proper title should have been, ‘A Who’s Who of Disrespected Omegas and the Men Who Took Advantage of Them.’

Opening the first page, Hermione rolled her eyes. Of course the first name had to be Malfoy.

Armand Malfoy, Alpha - Blythe Rosier, Omega, m. 1067. The first Malfoy in Britain, Armand was a loyal follower of King William I....

Blah, blah, blah. She flipped past several more pages.

Edward Nott, Alpha - Josephine Selwyn, Beta, m. 1253. With no Omegas born in this generation, Edward settled for a Beta wife...

Must have been a kick in the guts, Hermione chuckled to herself. *No Omega slaves available for the Nott family.*

Gilford Rowle, Alpha - Persephone Parkinson, Omega, m. 1326. A violent claim by Gilford ended this mating quickly...

Grimacing at the name *Rowle*, Hermione could imagine, but hated to think what ‘*violent claim*’ meant. And even though Pansy was now a good friend, the fact that her family line had ‘the bringer of death’ in it made Hermione snigger.

Chester Longbottom, Alpha - Maribelle Fawley, Omega, m. 1576. The charming Alpha’s mate was chosen at birth...

Hermione grinned. As much as she despised the thought of a subservient Omega bride, she was pleased that Neville had an Alpha in his family.

Rowan Black, Alpha - Alexis Travers, Beta, m. 1798. Irregular pairing where Rowan chose Alexis...

Irregular pairing? Was the Travers family not good enough for the Blacks? she thought rather tersely and flipped to the last page. The little book was interesting, but of no real help.

Tessie Prewett, Omega. b. 1909. d. 1984. Not paired.

Not paired.

Not. Paired.

Hermione did a little fist pump. *Feminist power. You go, Tessie Prewett.*

Prewett .

The name was familiar.

Frowning thoughtfully, Hermione flicked back through the book, absently reading random names, and quietly murmuring *Prewett* over and over again, hoping to jolt her memory.

Malfoy. Longbottom. Nott. Abbott. Yaxley. Parkinson. The big names were all there. Alpha and Omega pairings intertwining throughout the centuries.

Prewett. Prewett. Prewett.

She flicked quickly through the pages once more. Tessie Prewett was the only unpaired Omega in the book.

Prewett. Prewett. Prewett.

Gah ! It was like a soundbite in her mind — so close to the surface, but the cell holding the information was closed off.

Prewett. Prewett. Prewett.

And why was the name bothering her so much? Hermione was chasing facts, and an Omega who had already passed wasn't going to be of any assistance. Besides, she'd already decided she wasn't an Omega. Maybe Harry had been right, maybe she *was* an Animagus, she just wasn't aware.

She put the little book aside and picked up the one book she had refused to look at and had shoved aside in disgust — the *Pureblood Directory* by *Cantankerous Nott*. It was the one subject she'd never been interested in — the sanctimonious pureblood elite. Of course, not all pureblood families were elitists, but the ones who were caused a heavy hatred to burn inside her.

However, the infamous *Sacred Twenty-Eight* were listed in the book and maybe Prewett would be amongst them.

The first listing — Abbott — made her smile. There was nothing elitist about Hannah, despite her long lineage. And working every day with her just cemented the fact that Hannah wasn't a bigot nor did she ever look down on Hermione.

Prewett . Prewett. Prewett.

Hermione thumbed the pages, flicking them slowly until the the name she was searching for flashed past.

Prewett. Brothers Gideon and Fabian Prewett 'fought like heroes' in the First Wizarding War. It was said it took five Death Eaters to kill them, but only Antonin Dolohov was convicted of their murder.

Hermione closed her eyes and pinched the bridge of her nose.

"You really have lost your mind, Hermione," she muttered, cursing herself. "Molly Weasley was a Prewett."

"Hermione, dear, this is a surprise," Molly's usually kind face was full of concern. "Is everything alright?"

Hermione hadn't thought, her mind was too busy racing. Molly was a Prewett. Tessie was an Omega and Molly had to know something. So, she'd simply grabbed the two books and flooded home, having to wait until morning to head to The Burrow.

"Sorry to drop in unannounced," Hermione was slightly breathless — the luck of her find might mean she would finally get some answers. Or at the very least, rule out one more thing that she wasn't. "I have some questions."

"Questions, dear?" Molly's concerned expression shifted to one of bewilderment. "You have questions for *me* ? I'm sure there's nothing more I can teach you. You know too much already."

"Molly, you rid this world of Bellatrix Lestrange, you know more than you give yourself credit for."

Molly blushed, "Oh, *pfft* . I did what any mother would have done. Now, did you want some tea?"

Hermione answered in the affirmative and followed Molly into the kitchen, taking a seat at the scrubbed wooden table and watching as she set about making tea, moving with ease

around the kitchen.

Rebuilt after the fire that almost destroyed it, The Burrow looked the same as it had the first time Hermione set foot in the door. The clutter in the kitchen, the coziness of the mismatched furniture, family photos placed in every vacant spot available, and the crazy angles of the walls. It was a bewildering sight, but now just being there felt like a warm, welcoming hug that you didn't know you needed.

The house did, however, feel somewhat empty. Ginny was the only child still living at home — well, mostly living at home — but that would change in the coming months. Her wedding to Nikolai Dimov, the Durmstrang fire-breather from the Tri-Wizard tournament, was less than six months away and Hermione wondered how Molly and Arthur would cope with an empty house.

"I think this is the quietest I've ever heard it here," Hermione ventured.

"*Ah*, yes." Molly sat opposite her and poured the tea. "Isn't it lovely?"

Hermione laughed — she had her answer.

"You had some questions, dear?"

"Yes, but..." Hermione glanced down at her tea, suddenly nervous. Molly might simply refuse to say anything, the subject of Omegas being quite sensitive. "It's something I'm not quite sure how to ask."

"Just ask, dear. I'm sure it's not that bad."

"I had some questions about your Aunt," Hermione took a breath. "Your Aunt Tessie."

"Aunt Tessie? Why are you curious about... *oh*. Oh my." Molly pressed her palm to her chest, her face was a picture of shock.

"I know the subject is sensitive and never spoken about, but... things have been happening and I don't know why or what it means, and the Healers don't know either and Harry said something about Animagus but I know it's not that, and then I thought maybe—"

"Slow down, dear," Molly reached across the table and patted Hermione's arm. "Things have been happening?"

"Yes." Hermione nodded, "I can hear things across a crowded room and I can smell things that don't make sense."

"What is it that you smell?"

"Well, *um*... Ron." Hermione's face tinged pink. "He smells like burned and rotting flesh."

Molly didn't appear to be disturbed by the description of her youngest son. "Anyone else, dear?"

“Um...” Hermione looked up at the ceiling, thinking back over the last few weeks. “No one as bad as Ron. Hannah smells like sunshine, which is crazy, but that’s what it reminds me of. Harry is like woody cinnamon, and Ginny like fresh air. And I could go on and on with everyone, but...”

Molly waited, her face blank, not giving Hermione any indication of what she was thinking about the idiocy that she was hearing.

“I can also smell their partners on them,” Hermione waited for Molly to laugh, to tell her she was an Omega and would have to deal with her bottom rung status.

But Molly simply nodded. “What else have you noticed?”

“I... *ah*...” Hermione’s already pink cheeks flamed, and her voice dropped to a whisper. “I have dreams.”

“Dreams?”

“Yeah. Dreams that I wake up from kind of... hot and bothered.” Hermione shook her head. *What would Molly think?*

“Hot and bothered,” Molly mused and then asked, “How long does that last?”

“A few minutes.” Hermione thought about her dreams. “Well, the dreams last for hours, but when I wake, I’m usually, *um* ... over it in a few minutes. Although, sometimes the same feeling starts randomly, when I’m awake”

“And these feelings, have they occurred over just a few days?”

“No,” Hermione thought back to her first dream. It was pretty tame in comparison to the last few — just a deep voice purring in her ear and turning her legs to jelly. “The dreams have been happening almost every night for a few months and have gotten more and more intense, as have the, *ah* ... feelings.”

“So, this has been going on every night for a few months?” Molly was nodding and a smile formed on her round face.

Hermione nodded, “Yeah, the dreams, the feelings almost every night. And every day I get the smells and sounds.”

Molly let out a small sigh and reached across the table to squeeze Hermione’s hand. “You’re not an Omega, my dear.”

“I’m not?” Hermione was startled at the disappointment in her voice. She had assumed she would have been highly relieved. But, she guessed, she was now no closer to an answer.

“No, definitely not,” Molly smiled kindly at her. “How much do you know about Omegas?”

“Very little. There’s not much information in any books, and talking about them seems to be very much frowned upon,” Hermione reached into her bag and brought out the small book on

Alpha, Beta, and Omega pairings. “A few books told of the basics, heats and submissiveness, but no real information at all. Everything was more focused on Alphas.”

“Yes, well...” Molly shifted in her seat, “Alphas are rare enough but yes, there’s more information regarding them since Omegas are *extremely* rare. And because of their symptoms, Omegas are never discussed in open conversations.”

Hermione opened the book to the last page. “Tessie Prewett,” she read. “Omega. Born nineteen-oh-nine, died nineteen eighty-four. Not paired.” She looked up at Molly. “Not paired. What does that mean?”

Molly drained her teacup in one gulp, as if the tannins contained within the brewed leaves would give her the bracing strength she needed for this discussion.

“My Aunt Tessie *was* an Omega. But she was unlike any other known Omega in history. She was highly intelligent and fiercely independent, hated authority and she refused to bend to the will of others simply because she was a woman.” Molly winked and Hermione grinned; Aunt Tessie was a rebel. “And Aunt Tessie was not interested *at all* in the men of the world, which made life very difficult when she turned nineteen and the Omega hormones took over.”

“Nineteen?”

“Omegas come of age at nineteen. Their male counterparts turn a year earlier at eighteen.”

“Why the age difference?”

“It’s not rightly known. But I have often wondered if it might be to allow the Alpha male to grow into himself.” Molly held her hand up, stopping Hermione’s next question. “Alpha males are highly aggressive in the first few months after they turn, a newly turned Omega wouldn’t stand a chance against one, and it would be worse for her if there was more than one pursuing her.”

“Male hormones running rife,” Hermione nodded slowly, that made sense, but... “Newly turned Omega?”

“An Omega’s first heat happens within days of her turning nineteen, and it’s usually the strongest one, not that the following heats are any less intense. She has a rush of hormones that she has no control over, and if there’s an Alpha nearby, well... unless he’s got some sort of control over himself, the Omega probably wouldn’t survive.”

“And that happens every time, the hormone rush?”

Molly nodded, “For three days in every cycle, which is every three months.”

“And the Alphas... what?” Hermione held her hands up in question, “Do they go insane when an Omega is around?”

“When an Omega is in her heat cycle, yes, they tend to be quite... *rampant* in their pursuits,” Molly’s lips twisted in thought. “But, an Alpha generally lays claim to the Omega and is extremely protective of her and her needs even when she’s not in her heat cycle.”

“So why wasn’t Tessie paired?”

“Well, as it turns out, insanity isn’t the sole territory of the Alphas. Put quite simply, Aunt Tessie went insane.”

“Because of an Alpha?”

“No,” Molly shook her head sadly, “Because she refused to be with a man. Aunt Tessie wasn’t interested in men, but unfortunately only a male can... *ah*... ease the symptoms an Omega experiences. Aunt Tessie’s female partner couldn’t help her. Tessie’s mother was horrified at the predicament and wanted to force a mating, but her father was equally as horrified that his willful daughter should be forced to love someone she didn’t.”

“That’s disgusting,” Hermione shook her head. “Her own mother.”

“Yes, well, her mother wasn’t incredibly caring,” Molly sighed. “Poor Aunt Tessie. She suffered greatly. Her father built an impenetrable room for her and warded it every cycle, but the isolation and longing in those three days left her bereft of her senses, and slowly over time she became insane.”

Hermione’s heart sank. Poor Tessie indeed. Strong and independent and unable to choose the life she wanted, or enjoy the love she desired, because of a genetic mutation that drove her insane. She hated to think what it must have been like for her.

“Aunt Tessie was a rarity,” Molly said. “Mostly the Alpha and Omega pairings worked, and their lives were content.”

“ *Were* content?”

“There hasn’t been a pairing in decades. There have been several Alphas, but the last Omega was born in the twenties and unfortunately contracted Dragon Pox not long after she turned nineteen, and she didn’t survive.”

“Oh,” Hermione sighed and closed the book. She was no closer to finding out what was happening, but after hearing Molly’s tale, she was incredibly relieved that she wasn’t an Omega. “I’m not an Omega.”

“Definitely not,” Molly assured her. “Your symptoms don’t match.”

Hermione nodded, and then ticked each symptom off on her fingers. “Smells. Sounds. Dreams. Hot and bothered. Eyes changing—“

“Eyes changing?” Molly looked alarmed. “When did your eyes change? And in what manner?”

“Yesterday... no! The day before — Hannah sent me home after I first smelled Ron. And they grew lighter, like a golden colour. I’d never noticed it before. And, *ah*, it was after one particularly strong... feeling.”

“And did you dream that night?” Molly asked and Hermione’s face flushed crimson in response. “So, it was the first time you smelled someone—“

“No, that had been happening for a while. It was just the first time I reacted so badly.” Hermione grimaced at the memory. “I vomited, it was so bad.”

“You reacted badly to the odour, the internal *feelings* you had were strong, your eyes changed colour, and your dream that night was rather... intense?” Molly’s finger had begun tapping rapidly on the wooden table. “All of your symptoms hit you in one day?”

Hermione nodded. “Yeah, it was really odd. Everything seemed to hit me all at once. It’s never happened before.”

“Oh,” Molly gasped and stood quickly. “This is... oh my. Why didn’t I see it?”

“See what?” Hermione stood, her heart rate rising with panic at Molly’s reaction. “Molly, see what?”

“It can’t... you’re not...” Molly stared at her, and shook her head. “Sit down. And don’t move.”

Hermione jumped as Molly Disapparated, leaving her looking at the now vacant kitchen with a stunned expression. She sat down heavily and searched her mind. *Why had her changing eye colour set Molly off?* It had been odd, but also the least concerning symptom in Hermione’s mind. The acrid stench of her friend was what she was most worried about. It felt like an omen — not that she would admit to believing in such nonsense — and she was concerned that the deathly smell meant Ron’s life was in danger.

And what did all of her symptoms hitting her at once have to do with anything? She’d been suffering from varying combinations since this craziness began.

A popping sound signalled Molly’s return, and her expression was dire.

“Molly, what’s going—?”

“We have to wait... I don’t know enough... I’ve sent an owl...” Molly patted Hermione’s shoulder and crossed the room to look out the window. “It shouldn’t be long... she knows... important...”

Molly continued to mutter to herself, crossing back and forth from the window to Hermione, patting her shoulder in a rather anxious manner. She ignored Hermione’s every question, simply telling her to be patient, that it wouldn’t be long.

An owl arrived on the windowsill ten minutes later, with parchment tied to its foot, and Molly almost tore it in half in her haste to open it.

“Molly! What’s going on!?” Hermione’s voice rose.

“It’s alright, dear. We can go.” She grabbed Hermione’s arm and dragged her to the floo.

“I’m not going anywhere until you tell me what’s going on!” Hermione yelled and yanked her arm from Molly’s grasp.

“Hermione,” Molly said calmly. “You will find out what I think, but I’m not the one who can tell you everything. Please, Hermione, you have to trust me on this.”

Hermione took a deep breath, and despite every instinct telling her not to, she nodded.

Molly tossed the floo powder into the air, and much to Hermione’s horror, called, “ *Malfoy Manor.* ”

Chapter 4

“Here? You brought me *here* !?” Hermione was outraged that Molly would bring her to the place of her torture. “What were you thinking? I don’t want to be here. I *never* want to be here!”

“It’s okay, Hermione—“ Molly began but Hermione continued to protest.

“Okay!? Bringing me here is never *okay* !” Hermione was almost shouting. “I was almost killed the last time I was here! Do you even remember that? These people hate me, and they don’t think any more highly of you!”

Molly gripped Hermione’s arms tightly and used her best mothering voice. “Hermione Granger, stop this at once!”

But it was no use.

“No!” Hermione yelled so loudly Molly took a step back, both her hands held up in a gesture of surrender. “How could you, Molly? How could you even think to bring me here? And why? So that the self-righteous Malfoys can belittle me some more?”

“The Malfoys mean you no harm. They’ve changed their ways, they’re not the same people you knew before the war.”

“She’s right,” a calm voice said from behind them. “The self-righteous Malfoys *have* indeed amended their ways.”

Hermione whipped around and was startled to see Narcissa Malfoy standing demurely before them, her hands clasped in front of her, her head slightly bowed.

“I ask not for your forgiveness, Ms Granger, for I surely do not deserve it. But please rest assured, you are welcome here and no harm will come to you within these walls.”

Hermione tugged her sleeve up her arm, “No *further* harm, you mean.”

“You are correct,” Narcissa nodded and stepped in front of her. She gently touched Hermione’s outstretched arm and winced at the horrendous scar. “This is unforgivable, and a million apologies will never change that.”

Hermione gaped at Narcissa’s delicate fingers on her arm. The fact that she was touching her scar — touching her — was astounding. Narcissa Malfoy was a purist, she would never lower herself to touch a filthy Mudblood.

“Ms Granger,” Narcissa’s voice still remained calm. “You *should* be aggrieved and infuriated at my family. Our treatment of you, and of your friends, was abhorrent. You have every right to be mistrustful, but Molly has brought you here for a reason, and I believe I have the information that you seek.”

Hermione turned on Molly, incredulous that she had dared to tell Narcissa Malfoy, of all people, what was happening. “You told her? Molly, how dare you!”

Molly took Hermione’s other hand in hers and squeezed gently. “Hermione, dear, Narcissa is the *only* one who knows about what I suspect. The Black family has a history that is never spoken about. Please, Hermione, trust me and listen to Narcissa.”

An odd sensation tingled through Hermione’s limbs. Her anger seemed to drain from her and the feeling of unconditional love washed over her. A mother’s love. The two women holding her meant her no harm, they meant only to protect her. She could sense it — Harry must have felt the same.

She let out a long, shaky breath, and the tension in her shoulders relaxed. Hermione smiled awkwardly at both women, embarrassed at her petulant behaviour.

“I’m so sorry, I just—“

“You will never apologise in this house, Ms Granger. My family owes you a great debt, one which we could never adequately repay,” Narcissa smiled, a genuine, beautiful smile that warmed Hermione more than the touch of the woman’s hand on her scar. “Now, I’ve made tea and it’s waiting for us in the solarium. If you would...”

Narcissa made a gesture for them both to follow her. Hermione turned her gaze away as they passed the drawing room, and the three women sat in the glass-walled room overlooking the expansive Manor gardens.

“Hermione, dear,” Molly began while Narcissa poured the tea. “Narcissa is one of the last remaining descendants of a rare Alpha and she has the knowledge that can help with what’s happening to you.”

“What *is* happening to me?” Hermione glanced between both women. “You both seem to know, or at least think you know.”

Narcissa looked at Molly and Hermione saw the silent words pass between them. *When had they become friends?*

“Ms Granger—“

“It’s Hermione.”

Narcissa smiled and nodded, “Very well then. Hermione, the message that Molly sent described what you told her. Your senses are heightened; you see, feel and smell things that others can’t. You have erotic visions and your body has reacted to those visions. And I suspect you felt almost instantly calm when both she and I held your hands just a few minutes ago.”

Hermione nodded, not sure how Narcissa knew.

“Hermione, darling, Rowan Black—“

“Oh!” Hermione exclaimed, “Rowan Black married Alexis Travers in seventeen ninety-eight. It said it was an *irregular pairing*. ”

“ *It* said?” Narcissa was looking at Hermione with stunned amazement.

“A book I found with Alpha, Beta and Omega pairings. That’s how I found Molly’s aunt Tessie. She wasn’t paired.”

“And you memorised it that quickly? You truly are brilliant,” Narcissa said, causing Hermione to blush. “It *was* seventeen ninety-eight, and Rowan and Alexis were indeed an irregular pairing. Rowan was the Alpha, not Alexis.”

“ *Ah* , yeah,” Hermione, having remembered her manners, was much too polite to say *well duh*.

Narcissa smiled. “Darling, Rowan was a woman.”

“What?” she whispered.

“Rowan Black was a female Alpha, the rarest of the rare.”

Hermione’s jaw dropped open. Not once had she read anything that talked about female Alphas. And the possibility hadn’t even occurred to her.

“Rowan was only the third female Alpha known in Wizarding society,” Narcissa paused, glancing at Molly, and Hermione gasped.

“You think I’m—“ Hermione’s eyes grew round. “Holy shit.”

“That you’re the fourth? Yes, that’s exactly what we think,” Narcissa nodded towards Molly.

“Hermione, dear,” Molly began quietly. “My Aunt Tessie was a fascination for me. As you’re aware, the subject of Omegas is highly sensitive, and when I was growing up, Aunt Tessie was so loved by us all, but it was rare that anyone spoke about her being an Omega. So, through my own curiosity, I learned as much as I could, and that’s when I discovered Rowan, and the Alpha line in the Black family.”

“And my family,” Narcissa added, “ensured that every female born with the name of Black knew about Rowan and her importance in the Alpha, Beta, and Omega line.”

“But why do you think I’m an Alpha?”

Hermione’s face had gone deathly pale and Narcissa reached out and took her hand.

“Hermione, everything about you, your intelligence, your abilities, your empathy for others, the need you have to protect those around you. All of those things alone make you special, but all of the new emotions and heightened senses you have tell me that you are so much more than just special.”

Hermione turned to Molly. “Why did you think this? You said I definitely wasn’t an Omega, but why an Alpha?”

“You said your eyes changed,” Molly told her. “It’s well-known an Alphas’ eyes will change colour when... *ah...*”

“You’ve had seven children, Molly, no need to be embarrassed,” Narcissa chuckled. “Your eyes will change colour when you are aroused, darling. Male Alphas are known to show their dominance with the ability, it seems to... I’m not sure subdue is the right word... calm? Maybe that’s it. An Omega, especially a mated one, will calm even at the height of her heat when she sees the change in her mate’s eyes.”

Hermione nodded; it was all she could do. Her mind was reeling. *Alpha . Female Alpha*. How was it even possible? She wasn’t of pure blood, she wasn’t a part of the highest echelons of wizarding society. She was nothing. Just a simple, muggle-born witch trying to establish herself and her business, nothing more. And at her age she shouldn’t—

Her thoughts were cut off — Molly’s words from earlier echoed in her ears.

...come of age at eighteen ...

“Why now?” Hermione asked. “Molly said Alphas come of age at eighteen. So why did this not happen earlier?”

“You recently left the Ministry, yes?”

Hermione shrugged. “A year ago, but yes.”

“And word is that you’re doing very well?”

Hermione nodded — embarrassed at the fact that her success was known — and Narcissa continued. “As Molly told you, male Alphas change at eighteen, Omegas usually change a year later. But female Alphas are different. Her status will only emerge when her realisation of self is reached.”

Hermione frowned. “Meaning...?”

“Meaning, that when you decided that the Ministry job was not for you and you took charge of your own future, the Alpha side of you was triggered.”

“So... because my shop is successful I became an Alpha?”

“No, darling, it’s not quite that simple,” Narcissa said gently. “Your success is of little consequence to the process. I asked if *you* were doing well, not your shop. And I believe that you finally are. Because it’s the realisation of what *you* want, of the direction *you* wish to take, that you are now settled in *your* life. That’s why the Alpha that you are meant to be has finally appeared.”

Hermione glanced at Molly, who was simply smiling at her. The fact that her Alpha side hadn’t emerged when she was with Ron spoke volumes about their short-lived relationship.

“The two of you were never meant to be, dear,” Molly said, seeming to read her thoughts. “I think that’s obvious to everyone.”

“Is that why Ron smells so disgusting?”

Narcissa frowned. “I’m not sure what you mean.”

“Ron came to have lunch with me two days ago, but I couldn’t be near him. He smelled of rotting flesh,” Hermione shuddered. “I was literally sick.”

“Oh, dear,” Narcissa laughed. “Well, it appears because you rejected Mr. Weasley, your senses are simply reminding you of that.”

“What?” Hermione shook her head. “I didn’t reject him, we decided we were better as friends.”

“Unfortunately, the Alpha side of you doesn’t recognise the difference,” Narcissa said, “And also unfortunately, until you have bonded with your mate, Mr. Weasley’s odour will remain.”

“How...?” Hermione winced, her question may have fallen under the taboo tag. But Narcissa simply smiled.

“Please don’t be embarrassed, darling, you can ask anything.”

“How does the bonding occur?” Hermione’s face felt like it was on fire. “I mean, I get the... mechanics of it, but I’m sure there’s more.”

Narcissa carefully took Hermione’s hand in hers and held it palm up. “You have several sensitive glands on your body.” Watching closely, she gently ran her thumb over Hermione’s wrist causing her to hiss in pain and yank her arm away. “One on each wrist, one either side of your throat—” Narcissa pressed a finger to each side of her own neck, “—and, because you are a female Alpha, the insides of your thighs. An Alpha of either sex will only allow an attracted mate to touch and taste those glands. And that is a part of the bonding ritual. The first touches show trust, and it will grow from there.”

“Taste?” Hermione whispered, the images of her dream stranger running his tongue along the inside of her thigh flashed through her mind.

Narcissa nodded, a smirk forming on her face. “Yes, darling. Taste.”

Hermione closed her eyes and pressed her fingers to her forehead. Alphas. Bonding. Scent glands. Senses. Dreams. Mates. Eyes changing. The vile stench of rejection.

“I know this is a lot to take in. Omegas are rare enough, only a handful have been born in the last century, and your situation is even rarer. Alphas and Omegas have only ever been born from pureblood families, and their status is known soon after their births. And because of the precarious nature of an Omega, her family tends to have already chosen her mate before her first heat,” Narcissa noted the look of disgust on Hermione’s face and gently patted her knee. “Believe me when I say that an Omega in heat is in more danger than she is capable of recognising. Her heat causes her to lose all cognitive thought and reason, and in her

desperation to relieve the stress on her body, she will allow any man available to lay with her.”

Hermione’s disgust turned to terror. “Will that happen to me?”

“No, darling,” Narcissa assured her with a smile. “Female Alphas are different. You won’t go into heat, as such. Instead, once you discover your true Alpha soulmate and your magic is bonded, you won’t be limited to such singular passion. Each of you will seek the other out constantly and you both will dominate and submit to each other without a thought. Sex between an Alpha pair is the height of wonderment — although quite the taboo subject — in Wizarding society, and I’m sure it has been many a role-played fantasy behind closed doors.”

Hermione’s cheeks flamed at the thought — and at the ease with which Narcissa spoke of sex.

And then another thought occurred to her — there were only two Alpha males born into this generation. Alexander Avery, who was three years above Hermione at Hogwarts and already married. The other was—

Hermione’s spine tingled and she sat up, her head whipping to the door as it slowly opened. Her lip curled into a sneer and she glared at the man who had just entered the room.

“Ms Granger,” Lucius Malfoy nodded politely and bowed slightly.

Hermione looked at him warily, her entire body still tense as her eyes roamed over him. She settled her gaze on his face and noted the slight nervousness in his eyes. Her voice was cool — bordering on seductive — as she finally acknowledged him.

“Lucius.”

“It’s a pleasure, Ms Granger, to have you in our home,” He seemed to breathe a sigh of relief at her acknowledgment and then turned to look at Molly. “And you also, Molly.”

“Thank you, Lucius,” Molly nodded. “I do apologise for the interruption to your day.”

Lucius waved a hand in the air. “Oh, please don’t be distressed, Molly. I believe there are far more pressing matters at hand than a minor interruption to my day.”

He turned to his wife but hesitated and glanced at Hermione, who frowned. His face bore an expression that seemed to be waiting for her permission.

Hermione nodded — not sure of why she was doing so, nor of the reason why the small gesture gave her a certain amount of pleasure to do so — and watched closely as Lucius leaned down to kiss his wife.

“I have a meeting and will be absent for a few hours,” He smiled down at Narcissa with eyes so full of adoration, Hermione’s senses heightened and she felt a heavy stirring inside.

“That’s fine, Lucius,” Narcissa said, squeezing her husband’s arm, but she was watching Hermione. The girl’s whiskey-coloured eyes had turned golden and she was staring intently at Lucius. “Maybe you should head out, you wouldn’t want to be late.”

Lucius nodded — understanding immediately his wife’s meaning — and glancing at Hermione, he straightened and left the room quickly. Hermione stared after him, lifting her nose into the air and inhaling deeply. The heavy masculine scent filled her, swirled inside her and made her feel light-headed. But then there was something else...

The underlying aroma of Narcissa seared into his skin turned her stomach. She pressed her hand to her mouth, the scent was overpowering and a wave of nausea rolled over her.

“What did you scent?”

Hermione glanced at Narcissa, who was smiling — almost laughing — at her.

“Scent?”

Narcissa nodded. “It’s the proper term Alphas use when their sense of smell is heightened... usually when a member of the opposite sex is in their presence.”

Hermione shifted her gaze to the door, staring intently. “It was just... *ohmygod* !”

She snapped her eyes shut and buried her face in her hands. She had just scented Lucius Malfoy while his wife was sitting beside her.

Fuck .

Hermione felt an arm wrap around her shoulders. “Please don’t be alarmed. The instant you scented me on him, you felt ill, didn’t you?”

Hermione nodded behind her hands and her voice was muffled when she said, “I’m so sorry.”

“You are going through some rather big changes and your natural instincts will take charge until you learn to control them,” Narcissa laughed and dragged Hermione’s hands from her face. “Hermione, listen. Your attraction to Lucius was instinctual, but even more so was your natural aversion to him because as a female Alpha, your loyalty to other women would never allow you to take another’s partner.”

“That’s no excuse. Lucius is your—” she frowned. “Lucius is your husband, and the owner of this house. Why did he acknowledge me first, and why did he need my permission to kiss you?”

“You’re the Alpha in the room,” Narcissa stated simply. “Everyone will, as it were, bow to you.”

“That’s insane. I don’t want that. I hate the attention I get already.”

“And that’s what makes a female Alpha different from a male. Your ego isn’t in charge. Your instinct to take care of and protect everyone around you will be just as important as the attention you give to, and receive from, your mate.”

“So, despite my Alpha status, I’ll still take on, what... a nurturing role? I’ll still be submissive?”

Narcissa sighed. “It’s more complicated than that. No matter how much women have evolved, there will always be a part of the female psyche that needs to play the protector, the nurturer. It’s nothing to be ashamed of, and men — especially Alphas — seem to actually seek this particular quality out when finding a suitable mate. You can be a great leader and still want to protect and nurture those around you. And a *true* female Alpha is not afraid to submit to her mate because she knows that she is equal to him in both intellect and ability. And the mate you choose will understand you, and you will understand him. You will work in perfect unison, and the bond will be unbreakable.”

“*That* man sounds too good to be true,” Hermione rolled her eyes and Narcissa laughed.

“It’s most likely why your instincts kicked in when Lucius entered the room. He has had many egregious faults over the years, and he would be the first to admit it, but his need to protect his family is at the forefront of his every thought. You would have felt that the instant he was close.”

“That doesn’t make my scenting him any better.”

“Oh, darling, I know you meant no harm, and I dare you to try and take him from me,” Narcissa winked and Hermione laughed. “But I wonder if his scent...”

Narcissa glanced at Molly again, another silent exchange occurring between them.

“Is he here?” Molly asked.

“Rarely,” Narcissa rolled her eyes. “Too busy with—“

The roar of the floo lighting up interrupted them. A door slammed, startling both Molly and Narcissa, but Hermione maintained her calm.

“Mother!?” Draco’s voice rang out and then the door to the solarium flew open. “Mother, what the hell are you playing at? You’re hiding—”

He stopped abruptly when he saw the three women staring at him.

“Your manners are severely lacking, Draco,” Narcissa raised an eyebrow and glared at him. “You were not raised to bellow like an uncultured madman, nor were you raised to storm through this house in such a disrespectful display. Ms Granger and Mrs Weasley are my guests and do not need to be subjected to your deplorable behaviour.”

Draco’s lips moved, as if to say something, but no sound came out. His eyes flicked to Molly and then to Hermione, his gaze fixing on her. He subtly sniffed the air, his nostrils flaring, his

grey eyes turning crystal blue. He clenched his jaw, and his hands balled into fists, but he remained rooted to the spot.

Hermione stared back at him, her eyes trailing slowly from his face to his feet and back again.

Alexander Avery and Draco Malfoy. The only two Alphas born into this generation — in fact, the only two born in decades. While Alexander married early, Draco chose to flaunt his status — his massive ego wouldn't allow anyone to ignore the fact. And his transformation at eighteen had been remarkable. Almost overnight, he had gone from the skinny, pale, harsh-featured boy everyone knew to the man whose presence now filled every room he entered.

Well over six feet, he was broad and muscular, his once pale skin now glowed with health, and the timbre of his voice was a deep baritone that Hermione knew turned women into simpering fools. His escapades were the stuff of legend in the gossip columns — legend which Hermione avoided. She'd not ever been interested in Draco Malfoy and his discarded pile of women.

But now...

She inhaled deeply; the scent that permeated the room when he entered now overloaded her senses. She could smell the freshness of the wind in his hair, the argan and vanilla washed into his skin, the laundry soap in his clothes. And beneath it all, he held the purified air of an uncharted rainforest — clean and pure.

Hermione stood, and walked slowly to him, his eyes tracking her every movement. She stopped in front of him and closed her eyes. She could hear his heartbeat — a quick thumping sound that she knew had little to do with his rush to enter the room. His interest was piqued, as was his confusion. Her presence in his family's home was an anomaly to say the least.

But there was something else...

Stirring below the clean, fresh aromas of him, was a hint of spice, of heat, of...

She looked up into his eyes, the crystal-clear blue was staring back at her, and she instantly felt the calmness that Narcissa had described. His arousal was growing, but the confusion remained.

"Malfoy," Hermione's voice was barely half an octave above a whisper.

"Granger."

The rich, deep tone caused her to shiver. It was a sound she knew. It was a sound that had been purred into her ear.

It was him.

She had been dreaming of Draco Malfoy.

Chapter 5

“Is this wise?” Molly said in a low voice.

“I’m sure it will be fine,” Narcissa replied, her voice equally low.

“What if they become... *friendly* ?”

Narcissa’s lips twitched, her laughter was just below the surface. “Well, Molly, if they were to become *friendly* , as you say, you and I would disappear immediately and spend the afternoon enjoying coffee and cake in Diagon Alley.”

“We’d set more tongues wagging than these two,” Molly chuckled.

Hermione ignored the two women whispering behind her. She was completely focused on the man in front of her.

I want to worship you.

I want to make love to you.

I’ll catch you. I’ll always catch you.

The words he had spoken to her in her dream sounded in her mind, and the confusion she sensed from him had now merged with her own.

She stared up into his eyes, the same thousand hues of blue and grey from her dream stranger stared back at her.

Draco Malfoy.

The stranger haunting her dreams was Draco Malfoy.

She pressed her palm to his chest; his heart had slowed, as had hers. Narcissa’s words came back to her — *the change in eye colour would calm an Alpha’s mate.*

Was that what had happened? Had her eyes changed also? Had each of them calmed the other?

Was he her mate?

Moving her hand higher, she kept her eyes on his as she eased the collar of his shirt aside and gently slipped her fingers across the juncture of his neck and shoulder.

Draco let out a low hiss. “ *Granger* , what are—“

“Hush,” she told him. “Just let me feel you.”

He clenched his jaw again but made no move to stop her. She soothed her fingers over the scent gland and he tilted his head to the side, his tension easing with each stroke and a low purr sounded in his chest. That he was letting her touch him without protest meant his attraction was as real as hers.

“Do you like that?” Hermione whispered almost breathlessly. The feel of his skin under her fingertips was smooth and warm, and his pulse had begun beating in time with her own heart.

Draco murmured unintelligibly, her touch seeming to render him speechless, but he reached for her free hand and gently circled her wrist. His thumb on her wrist was nothing like Narcissa’s. Where hers had been sharp, almost painful, his was light, gentle, and sent a pleasant tingle through her nerves.

He lifted her hand slowly and held her wrist to his nose, inhaling deeply. His eyes rolled shut and he groaned.

She stepped closer to him — their bodies almost flush — and pressed up on her toes. The need to scent him, to press her nose to his skin and breathe deeply was overpowering. But his size dwarfed her and she was unable to reach him.

Hermione growled in frustration and twisted her hands in his shirt, attempting to pull him down to her. But her tiny frame was ineffectual against his bulk and he didn’t move. Instead, seeming to understand what she wanted, he wrapped his arms around her waist and lifted her, holding her against him. Hermione’s arms wrapped around his neck and she pressed her face against his shoulder.

It was there, the pure, clean smell of him. The same aroma she had scented when he entered the room. But this close, his aroma was mouth-watering, the scent was sharper, more alive, and the distinct hint of arousal began to permeate the air.

Unable to stop herself, she ran the tip of her tongue across the place her fingers had been caressing, groaning quietly as the divine taste of him spread across her tongue; rich, warm caramel with a sharp hint of the ocean.

He held her tighter, his strong arms giving her a sense of being protected, despite the Alpha in her rebelling against what felt like his attempt to dominate her.

Hermione heard the heavy inhale of breath as Draco pressed his face to her neck. The gentle touch of his lips over her own gland sent a rush of heat down her spine.

“Why do you smell like heaven?” Draco whispered.

“What does heaven smell like?”

“Like lilacs in full bloom,” He inhaled deeply again. “Like warm amber and honey. Sweet, spicy, intoxicating.”

Hermione slid her fingers through the silky strands of his hair, sighing deeply at the feel of his lips against her skin. "I think I like smelling like heaven."

"What are you?"

"I'm an Alpha," Hermione stared into his eyes. "I'm the same as you."

Draco's arms loosened around her and he slowly let her slide down his body. Hermione groaned quietly as she felt the solid length of him against her stomach.

"An Alpha? How?"

"*Female* Alpha," Hermione lifted his hand to her face, rubbing the scent gland on his wrist against her cheek. "Rarest of the rare."

Draco's senses seemed to be coming back and he frowned. "It's not possible."

He glanced over her shoulder at his mother and Molly; both women were watching them with amused expressions on their faces.

"How is this possible?"

"Draco, it *is* possible," Narcissa explained. "Female Alphas have existed, although it has been over two hundred years since one has."

Draco dropped his gaze back to Hermione. "But it can't be *you*."

"Excuse me?" Hermione stepped back and crossed her arms over her chest. "*It can't be me*? Why the hell not?"

"You're... you're..." Draco stammered, and Hermione drummed her fingers on her arm.

"I'm *what*?"

"You're a muggleborn. Alphas only exist amongst purebloods."

"Well, I guess I'm the exception to the rule," Hermione smiled sweetly and shoved her finger into his chest. "An exception you were quite happy to overlook just minutes ago."

"That was before I knew what you were," Draco snarled, his calm voice was now full of venom. "I'm an Alpha, I'll not submit to the likes of *you*."

"Oh, right, I forgot my place. I am in the presence of the great Draco Malfoy, pureblood Alpha, a man above all others."

Hermione took a step towards him, and despite her tiny size, Draco flinched. "I didn't ask you to submit to me. And once the world knows what I am, you won't have to concern yourself with me. I'm sure I'll have an endless stream of men lining up to win my favour. You will not even be a thought in my mind."

She tossed her head back and turned on her heel, strutting back to her place between Molly and Narcissa. She sat, crossing one leg over the other, and flapped a hand in his direction.

“You can leave, Draco. Molly, Narcissa and I were having an in-depth conversation regarding matters your caveman mentality would never comprehend.”

Draco stood rooted to the floor, his mouth gaping, his eyes wide and filled with astonishment. Hermione doubted that anyone had ever spoken to him in such a manner.

“Off you go,” Hermione told him. “You’ve no need to be here.”

Draco’s jaw clenched so hard Hermione thought it would break. His hands slowly balled into fists and Hermione could feel the anger building inside him.

“Draco, I’m not sure which part of this you’re not understanding, but unless you were planning on joining us for tea and discussing the fact that there is now an Alpha female in the world — an Alpha female who is as strong and as smart as any male before her — I suggest you leave.”

“*You... you...*” Draco hissed his annoyance as Hermione smiled at him. He glared one last time at her, before spinning around and flouncing towards the door in a way that Lucius would have been proud of. Yanking the door open so hard it almost flew off its hinges, Draco glanced back over his shoulder, the sullen expression still firmly set on his face.

Hermione smiled and shrugged, and a shot of smug pride filled her chest as he sniffed the air once more before he stormed out, slamming the door behind him.

Her Alpha hearing allowed his mumbled curses to reach her ears as his retreating footsteps thumped down the hallway. All the air left her lungs in a rush and she slumped back against the settee, staring at the doorway for several long seconds.

She’d pissed him off.

Yes, he deserved her anger, deserved her sarcasm, but pissing him off hadn’t been her intention.

The smell of him had been divine, almost overwhelming. She wanted to bathe in him, to cover her skin with the fresh, clean scent. She wanted every other woman on the planet to smell her on him, wanted him to wrap his arms around her again and never let her go.

And the feelings that rushed through her the second he walked through the door had been unlike anything she’d ever experienced — even in her dreams. Everything inside her screamed at her to go to him, that he was there only for her, that he had somehow known where she was.

And when he held her, when he lifted her off the floor and pressed her against him, it felt... right. *He* felt right. It was as if they were connected, as if they both knew there was no other that they would ever be content with.

He was her equal. She could feel his strength, his power, his dominance, and she knew without a doubt he was the only man who would satisfy the desire that had stirred inside her the second he stepped into the room.

But she had also felt the Alpha prowling just below the surface.

Felt it in both of them.

The need to control, to command, to assert their own dominance was like an unseen force — each pushing heavily against the other. It was intoxicating, the desire to have him covet her body, but also the feeling of power she knew she could wield over him. And after just minutes with him, she was addicted. His scent had lowered her inhibitions, and his strength had made her impulsive — had brought the Alpha out in her. The way she had tasted him, running her tongue across the sweet, salty scent gland... she never knew she needed it, but one taste of him, and she wanted more.

“Well,” Narcissa began, the amusement obvious in her tone. “My son has certainly met his match.”

Hermione startled at Narcissa’s voice; she had almost forgotten the two women were in the room.

They’d been in the room.

They’d witnessed her wanton behaviour.

She glanced between them, waiting for the mortification to hit her, but there was nothing. No embarrassment, no horrifying shame at her actions. She wasn’t even concerned that Narcissa had witnessed her unabashedly pawing at her son.

A wicked smile slowly curved Hermione’s lips, and mischief danced in her eyes.

“I’m an Alpha,” she said and returned her gaze to the door. “And that man is my mate.”

Hermione poured a glass of merlot and cozied herself on the couch, curling her feet beneath her and letting her thoughts float freely around inside her head.

She was an Alpha.

She was the first female Alpha in over two hundred years.

It explained why she excelled in her childhood and teens.

It explained why she lied the first time she smelled Amortentia.

She *had* smelled freshly mown grass and new parchment, but she'd not smelled Ron's hair. Instead, she'd smelled broom polish and green apples. And even back then, she somehow knew the scent belonged to Draco. But to have admitted that all those years ago would have been to her own detriment.

But clearly she had been unconsciously drawn to Draco back then, and now, there was nothing unconscious about it.

Draco Malfoy was an Alpha.

Draco Malfoy was someone she shouldn't want.

Without meaning to, maybe he had started to affect her in their teens. Or maybe she had affected him. Maybe the hidden senses in them both had triggered a minute manifestation of their future Alphas without either of them realising.

Maybe that was why they clashed so often, why she refused to back down when he belittled her with his bigoted ideals. Why he'd not revealed them at the Manor. Why she felt the heart-wrenching pull of despair when he was called to cross the courtyard in the final battle.

She sighed and took a sip of her wine. She congratulated herself on her choice; it tasted delicious... not nearly as delicious as Draco had, but delicious nonetheless.

The book regarding Alphas that Narcissa had given her from the library in the Manor was lying open on the coffee table. She'd skimmed through it, reading passages here and there, but had been unable to really take anything in. She would have usually enjoyed the silence, the solitude, and would have spent the evening devouring the information. But now, glancing around her flat, all she felt was alone.

Her independence was something she had always been proud of. She'd worked hard to prove she was more than just one of the 'Golden Trio'. She loved Harry and Ron, they were the brothers she'd never had, but she also hated that her successes were never spoken of without the mention of their names.

And the feelings she was now experiencing were confusing and contradictory.

She savoured the quiet, but was craving conversation.

She enjoyed her own company, but now wished for another to be in her presence.

She would have preferred to share a bottle of wine instead of drinking alone.

And it wasn't just anyone that she wanted with her.

Her attraction to Draco Malfoy wasn't just physical — she felt an instant emotional connection with him. And it wasn't about fate playing her hand, or Divination thumbing its nose at her, or even some kind of matchmaking scheme.

She knew, in part, it was the Alpha calling to her, but there was something else, something beyond what her limited experience with normal men had allowed her to know. The feeling

was strong, a sense of ownership, of possessiveness, of contentment in his presence. Had Alexander Avery been available, she knew without a doubt that he would be of no interest to her.

And she had to assume it was the same for him. Draco had sought her out, had come to her when he sensed her in his family home. That definitely wasn't fate. That was raw attraction; the aggressive nature of the male Alpha.

Or was it?

Was there something else at play here? Or someone?

Another thought floated around her mind.

What had Narcissa said? Alpha soulmate.

Hermione picked up the small book, turning the pages slowly, searching for the names of each female Alpha. The names she'd not noticed in her previous search.

Emaline Rosier, Alpha - Finlay Rowle, Beta, m. 1196

The first known female Alpha shocked the entire wizarding world, and sparked testing at birth for every child born into wizarding families...

Claire Burke, Alpha - Luca Zabini, Beta, m. 1458

The Burke and Zabini families pre-arranged the pairing at Claire's birth...

Rowan Black, Alpha - Alexis Travers, Beta, m. 1798.

Irregular pairing where Rowan chose Alexis...

Alpha soulmate. Narcissa's words sounded again inside her head.

None of the previous female Alphas had chosen a male Alpha — or had a male Alpha chosen for them. So why did Narcissa suggest an Alpha pairing was the only option?

Alpha/Beta.

Alpha/Beta.

Alpha/Beta.

Three female Alphas. Three Alpha/Beta pairings. Her words made no sense.

Frowning, Hermione picked up the Alpha book Narcissa had loaned her and scanned the index, but nothing indicated any chapters on Alpha pairings. Besides, none of the male Alphas had ever gotten the chance to be with a female Alpha, and vice-versa. The pairings throughout history were always an Alpha with a Beta or Omega. No male and female Alphas had ever had the chance to bond since there'd not been a time that two had existed together.

She and Draco were the first. Ever.

Hermione pursed her lips. Fate might not be involved, nor Divination, and even if they were, neither had anything on Narcissa Malfoy's matchmaking skills.

She picked up her glass and walked to the window, scowling into the night sky. She'd been right to be mad at Molly. Taking her to the Manor *had* been wrong. Narcissa would have received Molly's note and Hermione was sure the plan to have her and Draco paired was hatched within minutes.

She wanted to floo back to the Manor and scream at Narcissa. She'd been tortured in that house and now she was being mocked. The sweet way in which Narcissa had spoken, had explained, had teased and joked with her, was clearly all just a ruse.

But...

The feeling of calm Hermione had felt at Narcissa's touch, the sense of unconditional love, the sense of trust, couldn't be mistaken.

There was also the way Narcissa had berated her son. Alpha or not, she clearly expected him to behave in the manner he was raised.

And what else had she said?

My son has certainly met his match.

Narcissa clearly only wanted what was best for her son. And Hermione's chest filled with pride at the notion that Narcissa thought her the best.

But, the Malfoys would need to learn some respect. Hermione wouldn't simply bend to their will. And while she knew with every fibre of her being that she and Draco were indeed meant to be together, she wouldn't allow them to simply expect her to be compliant.

Draco was an Alpha, but so was she. And *he* would have to prove himself to her. Not the other way around.

She finished her wine and floated the glass to the sink, glancing once more out the window. Two days ago she was Hermione Granger, confused and scared about what was happening. Now she was Hermione Granger, Alpha.

And she knew exactly what she wanted.

The knowledge of who she was, *what* she was, had lifted the heaviness from her being, and for the first time since this craziness began, she was calm.

She pulled the curtain and flicked off the light, and as she made her way up the stairs, she smiled to herself.

And wished for her sleeping mind to be filled with images of the man she knew soon would be hers.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"You're a what?"

Pansy, Ginny, and Daphne were all staring at her in shock. Daphne — poor Daphne — was across the room. Ron's decaying flesh smell was all over her, and even with a cleansing charm, hints of the odour still lingered.

It was the sole reason Hermione had to explain what was really going on.

She hadn't planned to. She'd decided to keep her secret for a while, the pressure — and no doubt the interest in her — would be too much to deal with. She hated her fame already, adding her new status to the mix would have driven her barmy. It had only been two days since Narcissa and Molly's bombshell had been dropped on her, and she was still processing.

But the second Daphne stepped through the floo, Hermione was hit with the same decaying scent, and Sunday brunch would be impossible if Hermione had to be near her.

"Hermione," Pansy said cautiously. "Women are Omegas. Only men are Alphas."

"That's incorrect. There have actually been three other Alpha females in history," Hermione explained. "Emaline Rosier in eleven-ninety-six, Claire Burke in fourteen-fifty-eight, and Rowan Black in seventeen-ninety-eight."

Ginny laughed. "You memorised them already?"

"It's not a huge list, Gin," Hermione said.

"How have we never heard of this?" Pansy asked. "This is something we should know."

"Male Alphas are rarely spoken about, do you honestly think the female version would be a hot topic?" Hermione countered. "And it's been almost two hundred years since the last one, so the subject has long been lost."

"Does this make you a pureblood?" Ginny asked. "Alphas and Omegas only come from pureblood families."

Hermione shook her head. "No. Narcissa said—"

"Narcissa?" Pansy looked dumbfounded. "As in Narcissa Malfoy?"

"The very one," Hermione nodded. "Molly insisted that—"

"Mum knows?" Ginny face mirrored Pansy's. "How did she get involved?"

"If you'd both stop interrupting me, I'll tell you!" Hermione shouted in frustration and Daphne chuckled from her place in the armchair in the corner of the room.

"Probably a good idea, you two. Hermione is an Alpha now," Daphne paused and smiled. "Actually, Hermione has always been an Alpha."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Hermione asked indignantly.

"Don't get snotty," Daphne chided gently. "I meant it as a compliment. You're the smartest, most talented person I know, and whenever you enter a room, everyone else thinks the same. But the most important thing is, you don't even know it."

"Why is *that* important?"

"Because that's how an Alpha works... well, male Alphas, anyway. Everyone is drawn to them simply because they lift people up and they feel important just being in an Alpha's presence."

Hermione twisted around in her chair. The odour surrounding Daphne was still lingering, but the cleansing charm had made it somewhat more bearable. "How do you know that?"

"We've had two Alphas and an Omega in the Greengrass family. Wesley, Thomas, and Marisol. I wouldn't necessarily say it's a proud history; it's considered uncouth to brag about Alphas and Omegas in the family. And of course, it's been over three hundred years since Marisol, and as you say, they're rarely spoken about. But I have some knowledge."

Hermione turned to Pansy. "The Parkinsons had one Omega."

"Did we?" Pansy shrugged. "I've never been told."

"We had Aunt Tessie," Ginny said. "But I was only three when she died, and we never talk about her because she apparently went insane."

"Yeah, it was your Aunt Tessie who started all of this... well, kind of," Hermione told her.

Ginny frowned, but it was Daphne who spoke.

"Why don't you start at the beginning?"

Hermione smiled; Daphne was always the calming influence in the group. Hermione believed it was the reason Ron had fallen so hard for her.

"A few months back..." Hermione began, and then launched into her story.

Dreams, sounds, smells.

Thinking she was an Omega, Aunt Tessie, Rowan Black.

Molly, Narcissa, her embarrassing scenting of Lucius.

And Draco.

Draco showing up unexpectedly. Draco allowing her to touch him. Draco storming out when he realised her power over him.

And of course that was where Ginny and Pansy focused — on her dreams and on Draco.

"How hot are these dreams you're having?" Pansy wiggled her eyebrows suggestively and smirked.

"And is it *always* Draco?" Ginny asked, her own smirk matching Pansy's.

"Honestly, you two. Do you ever think of anything else?"

"Rarely," Pansy said with a shrug. "But, Draco's an Alpha, and you told us you got awfully friendly with him...."

"And it's a fantasy no one ever talks about," Daphne added. "Two Alphas together."

"Narcissa alluded to the same," Hermione sighed. "And, in all honesty, I think she may have an underlying interest in all of this."

"Do you think she's trying to force something between the two of you?" Daphne asked.

"Maybe," Hermione looked at all three of them in turn. "She kept saying *Alpha mate*, as if it was set in stone. But she can have no real influence in this, despite what she thinks."

"How so?" Ginny wondered for all of them.

"I've been reading..." Hermione rolled her eyes at their collective knowing groan. "I know, big shock. But, everything I've read in the last few days tells me I have the choice, and *no one* can influence it. I'll be drawn to the one person who I feel will fulfil my needs."

"Fulfil your needs... *right*," Pansy drawled, and then she and Ginny cracked up laughing.

Hermione glanced over at Daphne, hoping she would be more sensible, but even she had her fingers pressed to her lips, stifling her laugh.

"Not everything is about sex," Hermione huffed. "What I meant was, in most ways, an Alpha female isn't any different from a male. She only wants what's right for her. Someone who compliments her being, someone who will be her equal, someone who is strong but also allows her to be the same."

"But a male will go for an Omega every time, if one is present, right?" Pansy asked.

"Most likely," Hermione held her palms up and shrugged. "I'm not completely sure. Omegas are rare, and most Alpha males have never seen one. So they will find a suitable Beta, one who has the qualities that will compliment his."

"So..." Ginny screwed her face up in thought. "Draco will want you, since there are no Omegas around, and he's searching for the strongest and most intelligent woman he can find."

"And does this mean you'll bulk up?" Pansy sniggered. "Because that'd be weird."

Hermione shook her head. "That's only a male thing. A huge burst of testosterone when they come of age does that to them. Females change very little physically."

"So how did this even happen?" Ginny was still frowning in thought. "This has only ever happened with pureblood families."

"I don't know," Hermione admitted. Her research had said the same. Betas had been chosen from all walks of life, but Alphas and Omegas were the sole territory of the purebloods. "I seem to be an anomaly."

"Maybe you're a Jedi," Pansy said and Hermione balked.

"Jedi? What...? How...?" Hermione stammered.

Pansy flapped her hand in the air. "Harry makes me watch muggle movies... it was Star Trek? Star Wars? Something. I only pretend to be interested. But the kid in this movie was an anomaly, no one seemed to know where he came from, so they all believed he came from the Force or Midi-chlor-something. So maybe that's you."

Hermione stared at her in disbelief. Pansy never ceased in her ability to shock her. "*Ah*, well, that's similar... I guess."

"You're absolutely sure there's no other magical blood in your family?" Daphne was shaking her head at Pansy's reference. "It could be as simple as that."

"Positive," Hermione assured her. "I've researched that as well."

"Have you researched anything else?" Ginny's smirk returned. "Because Alphas are supposed to be huge... *everywhere*."

"Ooh, yeah. I have heard that," Pansy agreed. "Even more reason to pursue Draco. I mean, he has to be massive, right?"

"*Merlin*, yes," Daphne said slightly breathlessly. "His chest... oh, and his arms..."

Hermione ducked her head as her three friends laughed and started on about the rumours surrounding Alpha males and their... *equipment*.

It was something else Hermione had read about — it was kind of difficult to avoid. She was well aware of the mechanics of sex, of which parts went where, and with the experience of her dreams, she was well aware of the sensations those parts caused. And everything she had read — the book Narcissa had loaned her was especially explicit — proved her friends correct.

Male Alphas *were* big. Everywhere.

And the amount of sex an Alpha male could have without flagging seemed impossible.

"...supposedly it swells, almost to double its size, and then gets locked inside her..." Ginny was saying. "...shoots into her for minutes at a time and then is stuck there for like an hour after."

"Imagine it," Pansy sighed. "Hours..."

"Harry not doing it for you then?" Ginny chuckled and Pansy shoved at her shoulder.

"Harry is just fine, thank you," Pansy replied rather indignantly. "I'm just saying, if male Alphas can last hours, imagine what a female Alpha can do."

Knotting, Hermione thought. She had read about it over her morning tea. And then had taken a decidedly cold shower. But Ginny was right. The male's genitals *did* swell, he did ejaculate in large quantities, and he did remain inside a female until his body calmed enough to withdraw.

Of course, this was all with an Omega in heat, with a body that was prepared for his size. Not a female Alpha who had no experience with men at all.

She closed her eyes, breathing deeply. If this was all true, she wasn't sure how she would cope.

"Hermione?"

She looked up to find her friends all grinning at her.

"We shouldn't be talking about this, Alphas are a taboo subject," Hermione said weakly.

"Oh come on!" Pansy laughed, "It's us. What happened with Draco? How did you really feel?"

Hermione couldn't answer. It felt too personal. Yes, she'd declared him her mate to Narcissa and Molly, but now that seemed to be in the heat of the moment.

She wanted Draco. Wanted him with a heavy desire that pulled at her heart and filled her every thought. And now that she knew who he was, the stranger in her dreams was no longer a stranger. Draco's face had materialised, and the dreams she'd had since she discovered who he was had been the stuff her friends would surely want to hear about. But, she didn't want to share her desire for him. Not with her friends, not with anyone.

Because she knew that once her status was known, all eyes would be on them, and the pressure for the first two Alphas to claim each other would be enormous.

It wasn't a pressure she wanted.

What she wanted was to know Draco. And she wanted to know him away from the prying eyes of the world, and her friends.

But, she still wasn't certain if Draco was truly interested in her. All the signs were there, but she was positive he'd been trained to believe that he was the Alpha, he was the one who would choose his mate. He clearly hadn't been expecting to be knocked off his pedestal once more by her.

"Ah... I... um..." Hermione stammered, trying to make something up, but her Draco-addled brain wasn't cooperating.

"What did he smell like?" Ginny sniffed the air comically. "I bet it was like fire or whiskey or... I don't know, what's a manly smell?"

"Sandalwood? That's what they always seem to add to men's fragrances," Pansy suggested, a wicked grin on her face. "It's gross, by the way."

"Still better than Daph I'm betting," Ginny said and ducked instantly as a cushion whizzed across the room and thumped against the wall.

"It's actually your brother who stinks, so I'm guessing it's a Weasley thing," Daphne flipped her middle finger at her sister-in-law causing Hermione to laugh. That was the other reason as to why Ron fell for Daphne. She was calm, but when provoked, she would rip you a new one.

"He smelled clean," Hermione finally told them.

"Clean?" Pansy sounded exasperated. "That's all you're giving us? Clean?"

"There's not much else to tell."

The vanilla and argan is mine, she thought. The salted caramel is mine. I won't share.

"I expected so much more," Ginny whined. "What about you? Did he smell you?"

You smell like heaven.

"It was unavoidable since we were in the same room," Hermione said, resolutely not thinking of the shiver that had skittered down her spine at his words.

"Dull and boring," Pansy moaned. "Maybe two Alphas don't work. Maybe it's just a myth and Alphas and Omegas are the actual true pairings."

Sweet, spicy, intoxicating.

It isn't a myth.

"How do you know?"

Hermione looked at Pansy. "How do I know what?"

"You just said, 'it isn't a myth'."

"Oh," Hermione could have kicked herself for allowing her thought to escape her. She sighed. "I know it's not a myth because of the instant attraction between us. His eyes changed when he saw me, he lifted me so I could scent him, so he could scent me. But as soon as he realised what I was, he got pissy and stormed out."

"Sounds like Draco," Daphne said with a shrug. "But I'm sure he was just shocked. He'll come around."

"But that's just it, I don't want him to 'come around'. I want him to be the man he was when he first walked into that room. The man who saw me as me, not as the Mudblood he always thinks I am. And I won't stand for anything less."

"And nor *should* you," Ginny agreed, "But you know that he doesn't think of you as *that* anymore."

Hermione knew she was right. An incident at Harry and Pansy's engagement party proved Ginny's point. Theo had made a rather inappropriate joke which had Draco almost tearing his friend into pieces. Hermione had been shocked at Draco's reaction, as had Theo, who apologised profusely and left early.

"And clearly he is who you want, right?" Pansy looked a little too hopeful. "Otherwise you wouldn't care this much."

"It was like a magnetic pull," Hermione said quietly. "Like... it was a sense of belonging. Like we were connected somehow."

"That's your answer then," Pansy slapped her hand on the arm of the sofa. "Deep down inside, he does want you. He's just too proud to admit it."

"Be patient," Ginny advised. "This is a lot for you to deal with, and probably more so for him. Neither of you were expecting this, so you just need to use your wily Alpha traits and make him see that it *is* you that he wants."

"Wily Alpha traits?" Hermione raised an eyebrow, "And just what would those be?"

Ginny shrugged. "I don't know... dazzle him with your brilliance, or... something like that."

Hermione laughed. "I'm not sure that's how it works, Gin."

"Well, then how?"

"I honestly don't know," Hermione shrugged. "There are no rules and I'm just so confused."

"I don't think this is a rule based situation," Pansy said. "You need to just go with your instincts."

"Instincts, *right*," Hermione said, shaking her head slowly.

"You said you could smell him, right?" Pansy asked and Hermione nodded. "And you said there was definitely something between you, even if it was only for a few minutes until he turned into a prissy brat. That's instinct, Hermione," She stood and moved to hug Hermione. "Now, since brunch is off thanks to Daphne, I have a groom-to-be to calm down."

"Harry still being a drama queen?" Ginny followed Pansy's lead, hugging Hermione tightly.

"I'm pretty sure he'll be in the dress, not me," Pansy rolled her eyes and they all laughed.

"You've got this, Hermione," Ginny said, blowing a kiss across the room to Daphne who poked her tongue out at her, and stepped into the floo after Pansy.

Daphne walked a wide berth around Hermione and paused in front of the fireplace.

"Hermione? How are you really?"

"Honestly, I'm not sure," Hermione admitted. "I'm perfectly fine with it one minute and feel like I can rule the world. And the next I'm questioning everything and just want to hide. I don't think that's very Alpha of me."

Daphne laughed. "This is all new, Hermione, you'll work it out. You are intelligent, truly brilliant, and gorgeous. And if he knows what's best for him, Draco will realise that there's no one else good enough for him."

"Thanks, Daph," Hermione smiled at the woman she never thought she would be friends with, but was now the voice of reason in her head. "And I'm sorry about the smelling of death thing."

"It's fine, it can't be helped," Daphne assured her, and stepped into the floo. "You're an Alpha, Hermione Granger. Be proud, and go after what you want. Be the amazing woman we all know you are."

"You're very wise. Maybe you should get checked."

"I was checked at birth, and alas, I'm merely a Beta," Daphne tilted her head to the side and smiled. "I'm sure he'll be seeking you out in no time, Hermione. He's crazy if he doesn't... and then you can let us in on all the Alpha secrets."

Hermione's cheeks flushed red, as Daphne winked and laughed, before disappearing into the abyss of the floo network.

She stared at the fireplace for half a minute and then bolted up the stairs. The shirt she'd been wearing when Draco lifted her into his arms was hanging off the bedpost, unwashed, and she needed to bury her face in it.

His scent was still strong, despite it having been two days since their meeting, and the vanilla-argan-saltwater aroma stilled her racing mind.

Everything seemed to calm and clear, and the barrage of questions from her friends that were floating in her brain quieted.

She'd confidently decided that Draco was her mate two days ago, and now her self-doubt and insecurities were threatening to ruin her desire to be with him.

She pressed her shirt to her face once more and inhaled deeply. Daphne was right.

You are an Alpha, Hermione Granger.

It's time to stand up and be the amazing woman everyone knows you are.

Chapter End Notes

A/N:

I've been remiss in saying a great big THANK YOU to everyone for their reviews and follows and favourites on this story. Everyone's support and kind words are gratefully appreciated, and I just hope I can do this little tale justice.

Chapter 7

After spending the rest of her Sunday re-reading the book on Alphas that Narcissa had given her, Hermione had woken up calm. Her dream had been quiet. Draco had certainly played his part, but rather than being erotic and breathtaking, it had been soothing and tranquil. She had simply lay wrapped in his arms, his body curled around hers, warm and comforting.

And when her eyes opened, she felt content. She stretched her arms over her head, the pop of various vertebrae snapping back into place sounding in the quiet and uncurling her spine. She smiled sleepily at the feeling of serenity, of having slept peacefully with dream Draco.

She hadn't realised the pressure she'd put on herself since the revelation of her status. More so, the pressure she'd put on Draco. She'd assumed — after their meeting at the Manor — they would simply fall together. His reaction to her, the unfathomable depth of blue in his eyes as he looked at her, the feel of him as he slowly lowered her to the floor. It all indicated he was attracted to her, but maybe she was wrong. Maybe it was just a normal male reaction, Alpha or not.

Hermione sighed and threw back the covers. It was a new day and she wouldn't start it by panicking about things she couldn't control. She would heed Pansy's advice and go with her instincts. Draco would seek her out or he wouldn't. She would not, she had decided, chase after him.

She might not have been as big or as strong as Draco, but after seeing — and feeling — his reaction to her, she knew she held considerable sway over him. And despite his harsh words and tantrum, she knew he was curious. He was too similar to her in that respect. He'd want to know why... and how.

She wanted to know the whys and hows herself, but it would have to wait.

She jumped out of bed and went through her normal morning routine, pausing only when she began to rub at her scar. She stared at her arm.

Mudblood.

Mud. Blood.

Dirty. Common. Impure.

The word didn't mean anything now and she reminded herself she was none of those things. The world had moved on, and enough was enough. She was stuck with the slur on her skin and there was nothing to be done about it. It was time to stop living in the past, to take control and focus on what she wanted.

Shaking her head — *you sound like you're making one of Luna's pseudo-psychology speeches* — Hermione continued her morning, energised with her new attitude and not actually realising she'd not touched her scar again.

"Whoa!" Hannah said by way of greeting as Hermione stepped out of the floo into the bookshop's interior. "Did you get hexed again?"

"Why?" Hermione paused at the counter and grinned at Hannah. She smelled fresh, like new leaves and newly turned soil. She'd been helping Neville again.

"When did you start dressing like *that*?"

"I thought I'd try something new."

Hermione glanced down at her attire. Along with her new attitude came a new outfit... well, a slightly charmed old outfit. She would usually be in a simple combination of trousers and a shirt or a skirt and blouse, and on Fridays both she and Hannah wore casual jeans and jumpers. But after staring at herself in the mirror trying to discern what was wrong with what she was seeing, she decided that her usual outfits were bland enough to fit into the grandmother category.

She'd undressed, but whilst standing in her closet, realised that her other choices were no better than what she'd been wearing. Picking up the discarded blouse, she closed her eyes and decided that her Luna-esque pep-talk made sense. She transfigured the plain, white blouse into a simple wrap dress.

However, when she stood in front of the mirror once more, the same boringness hit her.

"Hermione, come on," she berated her reflection. "You can do better than this."

A wave of her hand and the v-neck slipped a little lower, the hem a little higher. She twisted her lips thoughtfully and another hand wave had the fabric hugging her a little tighter and the knot on her hip tightened and cinched her waist.

She chose a pair of low heels, as she didn't trust herself to make it through the day in anything too high, and left her hair down, using a charm to tame her wild curls.

And clearly she'd made the right choice.

"Well, you look amazing," Hannah told her. "Tea and croissant? I hope you can stomach it."

"Thanks," Hermione replied, smiling at their usual Monday morning breakfast. "And I'm fine. It was just..."

She trailed off, not sure what to tell her. Hermione trusted Hannah with her life, but this was huge, and the fewer people who knew about it, the better.

"I guess maybe I did overdo it last weekend."

"Yeah," Hannah agreed. "You shouldn't let Ginny and Pansy influence you."

"You'd have thought I would have learned that by now," Hermione picked up the tea and croissant, and made a lame excuse to go into her office. She hated lying to Hannah, but right now it was a necessity.

She sat at her desk and looked at the breakfast Hannah had bought once again. Then she took in her desk. It was neat as a pin and the paperwork and back orders she was expecting to have to deal with after four days off were set neatly in a pile labelled 'done'.

Hannah and Ginny had taken care of everything for her. She could spend all morning in the shop, which was something she always wished she had more time to do.

She smiled again. She should have known. Hannah was brilliant and Ginny, despite sometimes being mouthy and crass, was willing to help anyone if they asked. They had done all her work without batting an eye, and now she was free to do what she loved — talk about, and sell, books.

But more importantly, she sensed the Alpha inside telling her that she should trust her instincts — and her staff — more often.

"Everything okay?" Hannah asked when Hermione returned to the shop counter.

"Everything's perfect," Hermione assured her. "You and Ginny have done a brilliant job. I have a few owls to send later, but now I can spend the morning out here."

Hannah blushed. "I just did my job."

Hermione squeezed her shoulder. "No, you took care of everything for me. Thank you."

"It was nothing, Hermione, really."

"Don't ever look down on yourself like that, Hannah, never thinking you're good enough. Always take a compliment for the way it was intended. And simply say *thank you* and move on."

"You should get hexed more often," Hannah laughed. "I like this new version of you."

"I don't give a shit who you are, you can't—"

Hermione looked up at the sound of Hannah's voice. Hannah never yelled in the shop, nor did she curse at customers. But when her office door flew open, Hermione understood.

"It's fine, Hannah," She held her hand up and waved Hannah away. "He can't help it, he suffers from a serious lack of manners, despite his upbringing."

"Yeah, well, he's a rude fucking asshole," Hannah glared at him and slammed the door closed.

Hermione stared at the door, a wry smile crawling across her face. She liked Hannah, and now she liked her even more. And having spent the morning working beside her, Hermione

knew she had made the right choice. The customers loved her, and she seemed to know some of them by name.

But Hermione had also noted a change when Hannah was beside her. Her energy seemed to spark, her smile was even brighter and her usual ease with the customers was even more so. And Hermione knew it wasn't just because of the compliment she'd paid her, it was simply because of her own presence. She had wanted to slap her ego for the thought, but all of her instincts told her she was right. And, once again, Narcissa had been right; people seemed drawn to her.

It was, she assumed, why he was here.

"Draco," Hermione drawled and leaned back in her chair. She crossed one leg over the other and silently applauded her transfiguration skills. The skirt of her dress had slid up and Draco's gaze dropped to her now bared thigh. "The pleasure is yours, I'm sure."

His eyes flicked back to hers and she could see the swirling storm as his irises changed colour. "What the fuck have you done, Granger?"

Hermione twisted her quill in her fingers, and biting her bottom lip, she brushed the feather across her chest.

"I'm not sure what you mean, Draco," Her voice dipped low, a sultry sound that had a visible effect on him. His eyes flared, the swirling grey storm lightening to an almost turquoise blue. "I've done nothing."

"No woman will come near me," He was fuming; she could feel the anger surging through him like Fiendfyre.

"Oh no," Hermione pressed her hand to her chest and gasped dramatically.

"Poor *little* Draco," her eyes dropped to the front of his trousers, "were all the vapid air-heads mean to you?"

"This is your fault," he spat. "You've marked me."

"*Marked* you?" She laughed, a deliberately haughty sound that she knew would aggravate him even more. "How could I have possibly marked you? There's only one way I could do that, Draco, and since your pureblood arrogance still thinks I'm beneath you, I don't think that's ever going to happen."

Draco's jaw clenched, and she couldn't help the pride that surged in her knowing she'd rendered him silent once more. She twisted the tie at her waist around her fingers and smiled internally as his eyes followed the movement of her hand. She could almost read his exact thoughts. *Tie her wrists together... bend her over the desk... fuck her from behind.*

She shifted slightly in her seat, pressing her thighs together as her body reacted to the images as they flashed through her mind. Thoughts such as those would never have occurred to her just weeks ago, but now those thoughts had her wondering just what it would be like... *wrists tied... bent over... Draco behind her....*

An audible sniffing sound caused her to look up in time to watch Draco as he moved to stand in front of her desk. He placed his hands on the heavy wood and leaned forward, one eyebrow arched and that familiar smirk on his face. It was an Alpha display of pure dominance that had the heat rising in her again.

"You seem to have forgotten who you're dealing with," Hermione cleared her throat and, regaining her composure, stood, mirroring his pose. He still towered over her and the clichéd flick of his eyes to the v-neck of her dress should have incensed her, but she didn't care. "I'm not one of your simpering bints. I'm more than equal to you, Draco. I always have been, and I won't bow to your arrogance, "

"Oh, I think you *are* simpering, Granger," He sniffed the air again and his smirk grew. "I think... in fact *I know*... that you *will* bow to me. I can scent that sweet cunt of yours dripping with desire."

Hermione raised her hand to slap his face, but his lightning quick reflexes stopped her, his large hand wrapping around her wrist.

"Now, now, Granger," his voice dripped with honey. "Play nicely."

"You're not the only one who can scent, Draco," Hermione reminded him testily. "I can smell how much you want me. I'm surprised you can even stand up, your dick must be like a rock."

"I'm not hard for *you*," he growled.

"Well it wouldn't be for anyone else," Hermione taunted. "No woman will come near you, right?"

Draco snarled and used his grip on her wrist to pull her forward, his mouth landing hard against hers. Her breath huffed out against his lips in surprise, but it was relief, not anger, that curled along her spine as his mouth slid over hers.

His lips were the perfect combination of hard and soft, and the caramel sweetness she would forever associate with him flooded her senses. And this kiss was far from anything she'd ever known. It was full of want and need and desire, and it was full of the longing that had woken her from her dreams.

Her free hand went to his chest, feeling the racing thump of his heart beneath the solid muscle. Without thinking, she reached for his collar, dragging it roughly aside and drawing her fingers over the sensitive gland.

A loud groan left him as he freed her wrist, reaching up and digging his fingers into her hair, holding her mouth tightly against his. A thrill shot through her and Hermione wanted to swallow the sound, wanted to hold onto it and listen to it on repeat, knowing that she had been the cause of it.

He pulled back, staring down at her in a lust-filled haze. His eyes had turned a shade of blue-green that didn't seem real. "This was a mistake."

"A huge mistake," Hermione agreed, and she knew by the expression on his face that her eyes had changed also.

"I hate you," Draco murmured. "You shouldn't exist."

"Fuck you, Draco," Hermione whispered, mesmerised by the change of colour in his eyes once more. "I am an Alpha."

His mouth was back on hers, kissing her slowly. The heat of his first kiss had dampened somewhat, but this kiss was deeper, more intense. His fingers began to draw slow circles on her scalp, his lips and tongue hot and persistent.

Hermione cursed the desk between them. She wanted to feel him against her, feel the effect she had on him. She wanted to let him know that if he was willing, so was she.

He pulled away again, his long sigh ragged as he exhaled and pressed his forehead to hers.

"Why did you mark me?" he asked quietly.

"I didn't," Hermione frowned against him. "I didn't bite you, Draco, I only touched you."

"That's all it took." He pressed his lips to her forehead.

"I'm sorry," she murmured. "I didn't know."

They stood in silence for half a minute, Draco's lips still pressed to her skin. She closed her eyes, focusing on the sound of his heartbeat, the warmth of his breath, and inhaled deeply. His scent was incredible, she wanted to bottle it and bathe in it daily.

"You're not who I want."

Hermione's own lusty haze vanished instantly and she made a choking noise. *Was he kidding? After that kiss?*

He slowly loosened his grip on her hair, and she didn't miss the way he dragged his wrist across the side of her neck, his scent gland rubbing across hers. Any male who came near her in the next few days would sense him on her.

She wanted to slap him.

"Why'd you do that?" she growled through gritted teeth before he pulled his hands away from her, looking taken aback. "You don't want me, but no one else can have me either?"

Draco looked at his wrist and then at her throat, and Hermione watched his expression change from startled to smug as realisation of what he'd just done dawned on him.

"Maybe now you'll know how it feels," He smirked. "Although, I doubt you have many guys chasing after you anyway."

"At least the *men* who chase after me won't give me any kind of venereal disease."

"And how the fuck do you know what kind of women chase me?"

Hermione laughed. "Are you kidding? You and your random woman of the week are well-known to the entire world. Your over-inflated ego doesn't allow anyone to forget who you are."

"Been keeping track of me then?" he sniggered, but Hermione saw a flicker of self-doubt in his eyes. She was certain Narcissa would have told him the same.

"Unfortunately, Pansy insists on reading page six to us at brunch every Sunday," Hermione made a show of straightening her dress and gave him an overly sweet smile. "It makes me sad when I hear about 'Alpha playboy Draco Malfoy' and how he can't seem to hold onto a woman." A muscle in his cheek twitched and Hermione leaned forward again, tapping her fingertip on his chin. "But don't let those nasty stories worry you. Just keep plowing through as many women as you can, I'm sure you'll find one who will satisfy you eventually."

"And what the fuck would you know about satisfaction? I doubt a prude like you would have ever satisfied a man."

Hermione sniffed the air, it was thick with a heady aroma of the vanilla and argan she had already scented on him, but the musky aroma of his arousal was stronger than both.

"Once more, your ego has spoken for you, and it truly knows very little about the people around you. Maybe if you looked at a real woman once in a while, the sad, pathetic stories about you would stop," She sat down and crossed one leg over the other, deliberately allowing her dress to ride up her thigh. "And you asked what I know about satisfying a man? Well, I know you don't want to leave this office *unsatisfied*—" She smiled and flicked her eyes to the bulge in his trousers, "—but unfortunately since you think I know nothing, you will be."

"Fuck you, Granger!" He roared. "Stay the fuck away from me!"

"Might I remind you that *you* came here?" Hermione remained calm despite the anger boiling inside her. "That *you* kissed *me*?"

Draco's anger turned to an expression of disgust and he rubbed the back of his hand across his mouth. "I won't be back!"

"Perfect!" Hermione smiled, but as soon as he slammed the door, she threw her inkwell in his direction, the smashing glass tinkling loudly in her ears.

She tilted her head back and stared at the ceiling, her breathing was harsh and her entire body was shaking with rage.

How dare he! How dare he kiss her like that? How dare he smell like that? How dare he taste like—

She squeezed her eyes shut, attempting to push aside the images of him. But it was useless. Everything about him was what she wanted. Even the domineering side. In fact, *that* was

what she found most appealing.

And that was the most confusing thing.

She should have hated the way he spoke to her, the way he stormed into her office and swept her off her feet and then dumped her like yesterday's garbage.

But then, there was the way he kissed her. The energy that sparked between them when their lips met couldn't be faked. His hands holding her to him, the groan when her fingers touched him, that he had let her touch him again. She knew none of what he had said was true. Everything about him told her he was lying, that he was craving her as much as she was him.

Her gaze returning to the door, she smiled at the ink as it oozed its way down to the floor.

Well, Mr Malfoy. If it's games you like to play, then it's game on.

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"Do you want to explain that... *thing* with Malfoy?" Hannah asked over her shoulder as she locked the door and flipped the sign to *closed*. "And don't say it was nothing, because I know it wasn't."

Hermione watched as Hannah walked towards her, stopping at the counter and resting on her elbows. They'd not been well acquainted during their school years since they were in different houses, but in the two months since she'd employed her, Hannah had become a trusted confidante and a good friend. And after her reaction to Draco storming into the shop, Hermione felt slightly guilty for not sharing what was going on.

Hermione sighed. "Hannah, there's something I need to tell you, but before I do, you have to promise you won't tell anyone. Not even Neville."

Hannah stood up straight, her palms flat on the counter, and Hermione watched her face as she tried to keep her surprise in check.

"Well, this sounds serious."

"It is," Hermione said. "Do I have your word?"

Hannah nodded, but realised at Hermione's expression that a simple nod wasn't enough. "I promise, Hermione. I won't say a word to anyone."

"I'm an Alpha."

Hannah's jaw dropped open and she made a tiny squeaking sound.

"Not what you were expecting?" Hermione asked and Hannah shook her head. "Me either."

Hannah exhaled slowly. "I think we need..."

She trailed off and after a long look at Hermione, she disappeared into the small kitchen at the back of the shop. When she returned she was holding up a bottle of firewhisky and two glasses.

"Stashed for difficult customers?" Hermione asked with a laugh.

"No," Hannah nodded towards the two armchairs beside the fireplace. "Mr Grimes brought it on Friday as a *thank you* for finally finding that book on how to tame Irish Pixies for him."

Hermione sat in one armchair while Hannah poured two drinks and handed one to her.

"One last thing," Hannah said and picked up her wand. She took a breath and focused. A familiar silvery-white vapour shot out of her wand and a sleek fox bounced around the shop.

"Neville, I will be late home, don't wait for me," Hannah smiled as her Patronus disappeared, and then she sat down. She took a large swallow of her drink and steeled Hermione with a serious stare. "Okay. So you're an Alpha, and I'm guessing that Malfoy isn't happy about it?"

Hermione laughed. "I think *isn't happy* is quite an understatement."

She wasn't happy either. But it was Draco's childish ranting and smug comments that had been the cause of her ire, not his simply being an Alpha.

"Hermione, how did this even happen? You're not male."

"There have been three female Alphas in Wizarding history, apparently I'm the fourth," Hermione shrugged. "And honestly, I have no idea how or why. I mean, it doesn't make any sense. I'm not a pureblood, I'm not special, I'm not—"

"You're *not* special. Are you kidding me?" Hannah barked in surprise. "Hermione, you're the most talented witch I've ever known. You helped bring down an army of Death Eaters. I think you go *beyond* special."

"Maybe, but that doesn't explain anything," Hermione sighed.

Hannah looked at her thoughtfully. "So, how does Malfoy know?"

"I was at the Manor and Narcissa was explaining some things and he showed up," Hermione paused and rolled her eyes. "Well, I say *showed up*, but it was more like his performance today."

"And you were at the Manor because...?"

"Molly took me there because Narcissa's great-great-great... how many greats are there in a two-hundred year old aunt?"

Hannah scratched her forehead, her face scrunching as she calculated. "Seven? Maybe eight."

"Well, whatever it is, she was the last female Alpha. Rowan Black, Narcissa's aunt."

"Makes sense why Molly took you there. Narcissa knows about female Alphas, yeah?" Hermione nodded and Hannah refilled their glasses, then curled her feet beneath her. "And Malfoy showed up and threw a tantrum?"

"Kind of," Hermione kicked off her shoes and mirrored Hannah's pose. "He stormed in, much like today, and things got a bit... heated."

"Ooh," Hannah's eyes grew wide with glee. "I hope you smacked that arsehole down."

Hermione snorted a laugh and Hannah's eyes grew even wider.

"You don't mean angry heated, do you?"

"No. Definitely not angry. Well, not at first," Hermione told her and then asked, "How much do you know about Alphas?"

"Only the basics and the rumours, and the snippets I've managed to read in books. Like everyone else, I know they exist, but no one really ever talks about them."

"Okay, well here's the abridged version. Alphas are usually highly intellectual, they're dominant, and *expect* to choose their mate. They have the ability to hear and feel and smell everything around them in a way that no one else can because of their heightened senses. And they also have scent glands on each wrist and—" Hermione touched each side of her neck just above her collarbones. "—on their necks. And in the case of females, on the insides of her thighs."

Hannah grinned. "Convenient."

"And that's why Draco was here today."

"He came here to lick your thighs?" Hannah sputtered, her drink dribbling down her chin.

Hermione frowned. "Lick my... Oh my god! No!"

Hannah wiped her hand across her chin and started to laugh. "It would have explained the yelling."

Hermione covered her face. "You heard that?"

"Just the first bit, and then I cast a *Silencio* at the door."

"Thank you," Hermione said. "And no, he didn't come here for that. He accused me of marking him," She held her hand up at Hannah's confusion. "Sorry. An Alpha will mark their mate by biting them, usually over one of the scent glands in the neck."

"And you did that to him?" Hannah looked both impressed and taken aback.

Hermione shook her head. "No. At the Manor we got close enough to touch each other. And I had no idea that simply touching his glands was enough for my scent to be on him. So naturally, the fact no women will go near him is my fault."

"Well, it kind of is," Hannah's cough sounded very much like *cockblocker*. "But what about you? He also touched you, right?"

"He did. But the last time I went on a date was over a year ago, so I've noticed nothing different when it comes to any men around me."

"You need to rectify that."

"Well... that's the problem."

"Why—Oh. *Ohhh*. Two Alphas," Hannah nodded slowly. "And you said *expected to choose their mate*. Does that mean neither of you have a choice? You *have* to be together?"

"No, I don't think it's a case of *have to*, there's never been a male and female Alpha existing at the same time before now so there's no real protocol," Hermione took a breath. "It's just... I know there's something between us."

"Something, as in...?"

"As in, he smells like no one else around me. He smells fresh and clean and... like he belongs to me. When I was at the Manor, and then today in my office, everything about him said he wanted me," Hermione shrugged. "Except when he *actually* said he didn't."

"He said he didn't want you?" Hannah looked incensed as Hermione nodded. "Well, he's lucky I left, because if I'd have heard him say that, he would be wearing his balls as earrings."

Hermione goggled at her and burst out laughing. "Are you related to Pansy?"

"Sorry, I get carried away sometimes," Hannah chuckled. "But seriously, he said he didn't want you?"

"Yeah. He kissed me and—"

"He kissed you? He yelled at you, he kissed you, he told you he didn't want you, and then he yelled at you some more?"

"That pretty much sums it up."

Hannah shook her head and then asked cautiously, "Hermione, if he's acting like this, why do you think there's something between you?"

"I don't know how to explain it properly, but everything about him feels right. And I know someone like Draco doesn't change overnight, but the way he reacted to me... when we were at the Manor, his eyes changed and he held me like he never wanted to let me go. And today when he kissed me, it was like something sparked between us. There was a connection I've never felt with anyone before."

"No one's *sparked* you before? It *has* been a while for you, hasn't it?" Hannah grinned. "I wonder if the stories about Alphas — *male Alphas* — are true?"

Hermione's face grew hot and she dropped her eyes to her lap. She hadn't intended for their conversation to take this turn. She had thought she'd tell Hannah about her Alpha status, that they'd both bitch about how much of an arse Draco was, and then she'd go home and spend another night confused about why she felt the way she did.

"Hermione?" Hannah said quietly. "Sorry. I overstepped."

Hermione looked up and smiled. "It's okay."

"No, it's not. Your sex life is not my business."

"Well," Hermione shrugged and her face grew even hotter. "I've no sex life to speak of, and... *uh*... never have."

Hannah stared silently at her for several long seconds before her eyes went wide. "Oh... *ah*... oh," she stammered.

"I know," Hermione winced at her own confession. "I'm pathetic and very un-Alpha."

"Hermione, no, you're not pathetic. Why would you think that?"

"I'm twenty-three."

"So?"

"So, everyone around me has probably been...."

"Been what...? Rolling in the hay? Doing the deed? Tapping some arse?" Hannah suggested and Hermione laughed.

"Yeah, doing *that* since they were seventeen and I'm just sitting over here in my grandma chair."

"You're not a grandma," Hannah assured her. "Is it an Alpha thing, maybe?"

"I think it's the complete opposite of an Alpha thing. Alphas flaunt themselves all over the place. Look at Draco, he's with a different woman almost every week."

"No, I mean that you've waited. Maybe it's — I don't want to sound like a cliché but — maybe it's different for females, maybe the Alpha side of you has been waiting for the right guy to come along."

"I'm not sure if that's a cliché or just sad," Hermione huffed. "Maybe Draco was right, maybe I *am* a prude."

"Oh, stop wallowing," Hannah told her. "And you're not a prude. Malfoy is definitely an arsehole, but you're not a prude. And now, since you shared with me, I'll share something with you. You ready?" Hermione nodded and Hannah grinned. "I've only ever been with Neville. One guy. That's it."

"Oh, that's..." Hermione smiled. "That's really sweet."

"Exactly. There's absolutely nothing wrong with waiting or even only ever having one partner. And who cares if you've never had sex? It's no one's business but your own," Hannah said. "And the whole concept of virginity is rubbish, by the way. It's just a word made up by men so they could shame and control women for centuries. It's not something sacred or to be protected. In fact, it's not even something physical; men seem to think we have some kind of peel-off label down there, like they've won some sort of great prize. And women certainly don't go *pop* the first time we have sex, we're not bottles of fucking champagne," Hannah rolled her eyes and Hermione laughed. "And just because Malfoy flaunts his Alpha status

doesn't mean you have to. But also, there'd be absolutely nothing wrong with finding some other hot piece of arse and making him jealous as hell."

"That wouldn't be fair to the hot piece of arse."

"*Pfft*. Who gives a crap about fair?" Hannah waved a hand at her. "Is Malfoy being fair to you?"

Hermione shook her head. No, Draco was not being fair to her, not by a long shot. Granted, this was as much a shock for him as it was for her, and he was probably as confused about his feelings as she was. But for him to revert to his teenage ways and speak to her like she didn't matter was uncalled for.

They weren't friends, simply acquaintances by default. And it was only Ron's and Harry's pairings with Daphne and Pansy that had forced a truce between them. The bitterness of their school years had slowly disappeared and they had managed to remain civil — not that they saw each other often.

Hermione knew Harry was well acquainted with Draco through Pansy, and even Ron spoke less tersely of him. But her own interactions with him were rare and usually only because Pansy invited her over when he was there.

And she'd never been attracted to him before.

She wasn't sure if it was his ego, or their history, or his reputation for discarding women like socks. Or a combination of all three. But she'd never had the swooning reaction to him and his Alpha status that other women did. And everything inside her head was telling her to remember that about him, however, her stupid heart and her overwhelming Alpha senses had other ideas.

"Hermione, clearly Draco feels something, his reactions have been enough to tell you that. But, you seem to be forgetting he's not the only Alpha in the room."

"No, it's not like that. When I'm near him, I have this overwhelming sense of power, like I know he'll do almost anything I ask. It's after he leaves that I crumble into a pathetic ball and question everything about my life."

"And he's probably as confused as you are. He's had six years to choose someone and hasn't. And then you come along, all smart and beautiful and Alpha-y, and he's not the top dog anymore."

"You're defending him?" Hermione smiled. "I thought you wanted to turn parts of his anatomy into jewellery?"

"Oh, believe me, if he speaks to you like that again, I'll make good on that promise. But I can *see* how you feel about him. Your eyes have changed colour at just the thought of him."

Hermione's fingers flew to her temple. "What?"

Hannah nodded. "They've been getting lighter and lighter the more we talk about him."

"Great," Hermione groaned. "One more thing I have no control over."

"It's only been a few days, Hermione, you need to give yourself a break," Hannah said. "You've discovered you're an Alpha, you're fairly certain who your mate is and that mate has yelled at you twice, and you have all these new senses that are driving you crazy. You'll figure this all out, and when you do, you'll be even more brilliant than you already are."

"I don't think brilliant is correct. Idiotic, maybe, but not brilliant."

"Do you remember what you said to me this morning?" Hannah asked. "You told me to never look down on myself, to never think I'm not good enough. And now you need to do the same. You are the woman other women want to emulate, and the woman men lust after. You came in here this morning confident and ready to take on the world. Don't let Malfoy's ranting make you think you're less than what you are."

"It's just so confusing, Hannah. I do feel like I can do anything, but at the slightest upset, I fall to pieces."

"I'm not surprised. You're dealing with so much right now, and all the different things you're feeling are *so* extreme, you're not sure how to handle everything at once, and that's okay. You don't have to have this all worked out instantly. And Malfoy constantly yelling at you isn't helping."

"But it's not just with Draco, it's with everyone. I feel so bad for Ron. He's one of my best friends and I can't even talk to him."

"You said Narcissa told you that female Alphas were more empathetic and nurturing, right?" Hannah asked, and Hermione nodded. "Maybe that's what's happening. Even though it's not actually your fault — not anyone's fault — you're taking the blame for not being able to talk to Ron. And regardless of how shitty Malfoy is acting, you still feel that you need to... I don't know... console him. That's showing great kindness, Hermione, and you should embrace it. I'm not an expert, but I think you can be strong and confident and take over the world, and still be kind and compassionate and want only what's best for everyone around you."

"I just have to get the balance right? How do I do that?"

"You don't have to be an expert in everything Alpha overnight, so start small. Maybe try to focus on getting control over those scents. I mean, that must be driving you insane."

"A little," Hermione admitted. "But I'm not sure it's something I can just shut off. Well, not until I mark my mate."

"Okay, well, how about controlling the things you can," Hannah suggested. "If Malfoy comes back, tell him he's not welcome until he can be respectful. And tell Ron that while you might not be able to be in the same room as him, you can still talk, either by owl post or even by the floo. Control the little things, and then maybe the bigger things won't seem so hard."

"I think you're in the wrong profession," Hermione told her. "You'd make a fortune being some kind of self-help guru."

"So far you're my only client," Hannah laughed. "Neville usually just smiles and kisses my cheek when I try to give him advice about his plants."

"Well, it makes sense, what you said. Control the little things," Hermione nodded slowly, thoughtfully. *Control what I can, and the rest won't seem so hard.*

"I think it's what you need to do," Hannah said. "You weren't prepared for this, your parents weren't told at your birth like wizarding parents, so this is a huge change for you to deal with. And, if you need me to, I'll kick Malfoy's arse for you."

Hermione laughed. "Thanks, Hannah. I needed this, a different perspective. And, you've been very insightful."

Hannah tipped her glass towards Hermione. "I do what I can, my friend."

Chapter End Notes

Apologies for the late posting. I've been on bushfire alert for the last 24 hours, and this was the last thing on my mind.

As always, thanks for the love for this little story xx

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Everything was about control, Hermione was learning. Controlling her emotions, controlling her thoughts, controlling her dreams. She had taken Hannah's advice and had begun to work through the things she could change.

A tentative first floo chat with Ron a few days after Hannah had suggested she try, had turned out to be perfect. She had been sure the malodorous stench would come through the fireplace, but her fears had been allayed and she had been ecstatic when Ron's nervous face appeared with no smells accompanying it.

His reaction as to why she could smell death on him was a shock at first. He'd asked a few questions and then shrugged and said it made perfect sense. She was smart, he told her, she was a brilliant witch, and she was a natural leader. Everyone should have known she was an Alpha.

Daphne had come through the floo on several occasions and sat with Hermione — once Hermione had used several cleansing charms on her — and much to Hermione's delight, the three had been able to spend several evenings chatting.

Her emotions were slowly becoming easier to control. The breakdowns and tantrums were becoming less frequent, and when something did set her off, she was able to calm herself quicker each time.

And her dreams.

Hermione had not thought it possible, but she'd also been able to control her dreams. She wasn't sure how, but dream Draco had become compliant — her subconscious seemed to be able to determine what his exact role would be when he showed up. He took control when she needed him to, but he also simply held her when she felt completely overwhelmed.

And *real* Draco.

His tantrum in her office three weeks prior had been the last time she had seen him. He'd even disappeared from page six. Pansy's theory was that he was pissed Hermione had proven once more to be his equal and he had gone into hiding to sulk.

But Hermione knew it was more than that. Her own feelings were proof enough. If he was feeling even half of what she was, he would be struggling to even look at another woman.

Her status was still unknown to the world, but she — and Hannah — had noticed a slight shift in the men who came into the shop. It was as if they sensed something about her, something different, something that confused the hell out of them. And the contradictions in

their mannerisms were laughable. They approached her with confidence but as soon as she spoke their nerves took over and they became stammering idiots.

Even muggle men seemed to look at her differently. And the maddening attempts of her friends when they were all together to get her to look at this guy or that were ridiculous.

Besides, none of them stood a chance. Her interest in them was non-existent. The instant attraction she felt with Draco hadn't occurred with any other man who had come near her. In fact, most of them repulsed her. Not in a 'smells like rotting flesh' way, but in a way that she couldn't quite describe.

It was as if all her senses went on guard and reminded her that she had already chosen her mate. That the men who *now* wanted to be near her were in no way good enough.

She was polite, civil, when she rejected their advances, but took great pride in knowing she held the power. But it also annoyed the hell out of her that they were only interested in her now that they sensed something different about her. It was just one more thing she would have to ask Narcissa about.

And that in itself was another oddity; Narcissa Malfoy had become a confidante. Molly had been a wonderful surrogate mother since her parents had been *Obliviated* and moved to the other side of the world. She had treated Hermione as one of her own children, and Hermione loved her dearly for it. But Narcissa had been unquestionably who Hermione had been drawn to.

Since their first meeting at the Manor, Narcissa had been checking in on her regularly, answering her questions, and sometimes just talking. And Hermione had begun to feel like she had found a very unlikely kindred spirit.

Despite her frosty demeanour, Narcissa had a warm and loving heart. She was intelligent — more so than Hermione had given her credit for — and well-read. And while Hermione was aware of Narcissa's want for her son to accept Hermione as his mate, and despite Hermione already having declared that she *wanted* Draco as her mate, they never spoke of it.

Instead, they talked of books and of Narcissa's extensive travels — of which Hermione was extremely jealous. They spoke of Hermione discovering she was a witch and how it was something akin to her discovering she was an Alpha. They even discussed the Malfoys' fall from grace and what it was that turned their bigoted beliefs to those of acceptance.

It was, Narcissa told her, the utter disgust in the Dark Lord's vision to destroy all non-magical beings that had been the turning point.

"We had our faults," Narcissa had told her with a lamenting sigh. "Faults that no matter how much time passes will never be forgotten. And nor should they. But we realised too late that we had made an error in judgement. It was why we remained in the castle after the final battle of the war. We wanted to help. It may have seemed like an empty gesture considering the side we chose, but it was the turning point for the Malfoys."

Hermione had still been shaking her head in surprise when Narcissa left her flat that afternoon.

And that was another thing. Narcissa always came to her, whether at the shop or her flat. She'd not once asked Hermione to return to the Manor. And Hermione was hesitant to do so anyway. Not out of fear — not the fear of her nightmares in any case. Instead, her horror at scenting Lucius still made her cringe.

Aside from the fact her eyes changed colour in his presence, and despite Narcissa assuring her repeatedly it was simply her natural instincts recognising Lucius' scent because he was linked to Draco, it was nonetheless embarrassing.

And that was something she'd not yet managed to control, her eyes changing, and she doubted she ever would. Narcissa had explained the colour change was a dominant aspect of Alphas, that it calmed their mates, but she'd never said if it was something that could be controlled.

Hermione took in a deep breath as she stood in front of the mirror, her nerves tightening once more.

While her confidence in her ability to learn control had grown, she was still concerned about what she considered such a drastic change to her usual attire.

A shopping spree with Hannah had spruced up her wardrobe, and her plain, old, grandmotherly clothes had been discarded. Dresses, skirts, shirts, and suits in a variety of materials and colours for work. Jeans, t-shirts and jumpers for weekends. And — as Hannah had laughingly insisted despite Hermione's protests that she never went anywhere ever — fancy evening wear. Just in case.

There was also new lingerie and sleepwear. But that had been Pansy's doing. She'd been incensed she'd not been invited to the shopping spree and had insisted she be the one to work her magic on Hermione's underwear drawer. And she had.

Pretty pastel colours, Pansy told her, for her days at work, and the deep rich colours for the naughty nights ahead.

Hermione had rolled her eyes and protested once more, but had to admit Pansy had exceptional taste.

And in wearing the lingerie, Hermione discovered the empowering feeling of knowing that she was well-dressed down to her skin, but also knowing that no one else was aware of what was hidden beneath the fabric of her clothes.

But now, staring at herself in the mirror, she needed a boost of empowerment.

She'd been twitchy since she woke; something had been niggling at her subconscious and she couldn't quite pinpoint what it was. Her sleep had been dreamless, and nothing had seemed off the previous day, but her instincts were on high alert.

Her choice of pencil-thin trousers, a silk shirt buttoned to the collar, and a fitted jacket seemed the proper choice. She felt the need to be covered up, protected, but she couldn't understand why.

She took another deep breath and exhaled slowly and, slipping into her low-heeled slingbacks, told herself to trust her instincts and not to worry, that everything would be fine.

Hermione stepped out of the floo and was surprised to see the shop windows had been blacked out. She looked quizzically at Hannah before realising Ginny was also there.

"Ginny, why are you—" Hermione began and then winced at the sudden realisation of what sounded like a hundred different voices all talking at once just outside the shop. "What's going on?"

"Don't panic," Hannah said. "I only blocked the windows so they couldn't see in."

Hermione frowned at the blackened windows and then at Hannah. "Obviously. But why is there a crowd out there? Did you announce a flash sale I wasn't aware of?"

"Hermione, you probably should sit down," Ginny rounded the counter and indicated the chair by the fireplace, but Hermione didn't move.

"What. Is. Going. On?" Hermione enunciated each word slowly, breathing deeply, and trying to remain calm.

Hannah and Ginny shared a glance and then Hannah moved to stand beside Ginny, holding The Daily Prophet towards Hermione.

Her own image was staring at her, arms crossed over her chest and her face was twisted into a severe scowl.

And the headline almost stopped her heart.

Hermione Granger: Alpha

"In what has become the biggest news since Harry Potter's vanquishing of Lord Voldemort and ending the war; it has been discovered that the Wizarding World's favourite witch and war heroine, Hermione Granger, is the first female Alpha in almost 200 years..."

Hermione read the first few lines and then dropped the paper to the floor. "How...?"

"We don't know," Ginny said. "There's no mention of a name, just a *source*."

Hermione glanced down at the newspaper on the floor and then back at the windows. When she spoke, her voice was harsh. "So they all came to see, because they have no idea what I look like, right? Or do they think I grew a second head overnight?"

Hannah snorted, but quickly swallowed the sound when Hermione glared at her.

"Don't look at us like that," Ginny warned. "We didn't tell anyone."

"Honestly, we didn't," Hannah agreed. "We swore on our magic, remember? And we've no idea who it was either."

Hermione ignored them and returned her attention to the windows. "And why are they even reporting this? Male Alphas aren't a topic of polite conversation. So why am I any different? This is complete bullshit."

The floor lit up and Narcissa stepped out, her face a picture of concern. "I saw the newspaper —"

Narcissa stopped short, her eyes growing wide as Hannah and Ginny slowly stepped away from Hermione.

Standing motionless in the centre of the shop, Hermione stared at the covered windows. Her breathing slowed and the air around her seemed to pulsate.

Magic began radiating from her in waves. The books rattled on the shelves, the lights flickered, and yelps of surprise could be heard as Hermione raised her hand, and the shield charm that Hannah had used to block the windows sparked and shocked the people on the other side of them.

"She can..." Narcissa was watching Hermione. "...she can do wandless magic?"

"Since she was eleven," Ginny said quietly and Narcissa gasped.

"Eleven," she whispered almost reverently.

"But I've never seen her do this," Ginny added.

"She's still trying to learn to control her emotions, and this is more than she can handle right now," Narcissa glanced at the newspaper on the floor before moving slowly to stand in front of Hermione. "Look at me, Hermione. Forget about everyone out there and focus on me."

Hannah and Ginny stood with their shoulders pressed together, identical expressions of shock on their faces. Hermione's jaw was clenched tightly and both her hands were balled into fists. Her eyes had become dark, almost black, as her anger grew.

"Ms Abbott, if you could make some tea, please," Narcissa said calmly. "And Ms Weasley, if you could go to The Burrow and ask your mother to come as quickly as she can. I will need some help with this."

Both girls nodded and took off to complete their respective tasks, both looking concerned about — and slightly terrified of — their friend.

"Hermione, please darling, you have to calm down," Narcissa slowly brought her hands up to Hermione's face, gently cupping her cheeks and holding her gaze. "Don't let your anger take over."

Hermione blinked, but her eyes remained unfocused, and another series of yelps — and quite a few cries of *what the fuck* — could be heard outside.

Narcissa was astounded by her abilities, by the amount of power she held within her. She was well aware that a few witches and wizards throughout history had been capable of wandless magic, but this was an ability the likes of which she'd never seen. The strength Hermione had shown at the Manor while she'd been tortured was nothing in comparison to what she was now witnessing. All the rumours of this girl being considered one of the most talented witches the world had ever seen were true.

"Narcissa, how bad—" Molly gasped as she emerged out of the floo. "Oh, my. This *is* bad."

Molly rushed to step behind Hermione and placed a gentle hand on her back between her shoulders. She glanced at Narcissa. "Did you know this could happen? Has Draco ever...?"

Narcissa was shaking her head. "Draco has asserted his displeasure at times, but not like this. Even in the first days when the hormones hit him, he wasn't able to do this. And I don't think this is Alpha specific. She has magic like I've never seen before."

Molly managed to smile. "Our Hermione certainly is a wonder."

Hannah returned with the tea and placed it on the counter. She noted Molly's hand on Hermione's back, Narcissa's on her face. "Can I help?"

"Please," Narcissa said with a nod. "Just touch her arm — not her wrist — but you need to be calm."

Hannah nodded and reached out to press her hand against Hermione's arm. "Hermione, it's okay. They can't see you, and we won't let them near you."

Ginny touched her hand gently to Hermione's other arm. "Is this like what Harry's mum did?"

"It's similar," Molly explained. "Lily used her touch to protect Harry. This should only calm her. We often used this technique on Remus."

"Ignore the voices outside, darling, and come back to us," Narcissa's voice was melodic, soothing, but it didn't help.

Another surge of magic radiated out of her, the force of it strong enough to rock them all on their feet. More yelps from outside were heard and Molly shook her head.

"You would think they would have moved away."

"People are stupid, Mum," Ginny rolled her eyes, and they noticed a small smile flickering on Hermione's face. "They're too busy being gossipy trolls to care about other people's feelings."

"Yeah," Hannah agreed, watching as Hermione blinked slowly. "Total gobshites, the lot of them."

"Probably sharing one brain cell between them," Ginny added and Hermione's smile grew wider.

"Keep going, girls," Narcissa told them. "She's responding to you both."

"I mean, they probably wouldn't know how to swish and flick a decent *Wingardium Leviosa* if Hermione did it for them," Hannah said.

Ginny snorted a laugh, and Hermione's blinking ceased as she began to focus on Narcissa.

"Maybe instead of sparking them like you are, you could set their robes on fire, like you did with Snape," Hannah suggested.

"Or remember when Draco was turned into a ferret? Maybe you could do that to them," Ginny grinned as Narcissa arched an eyebrow at her.

"He was a cute ferret," Ginny shrugged. "All white and fluffy."

Hannah clapped her hand over her mouth and Hermione huffed a laugh. Her face relaxed and her hands unfurled, her eyes slowly returned to their usual hazelnut-brown.

"There you are," Narcissa smiled at her. "You had us worried."

Hermione glanced around, as if trying to remember where she was. The air around them was heavy with the strength of her magic, and she finally exhaled a long breath when Molly wrapped her arms around her waist and hugged her tightly.

"I was angry," Hermione said in a hushed voice. "I was angry and... did I black out?"

Molly released her and gently guided her to the armchair beside the floo. "Some tea please, Hannah."

"What do you remember?" Narcissa asked as Hannah handed Hermione the tea.

"Um... just that..." she looked around, her eyes landing on the discarded newspaper. "Oh. *Ohh*."

Molly grasped her shoulder. "It's alright, dear. None of them know you're actually here. And right now it's just a story, you've not confirmed anything."

"I'll have to at some point, though, won't I?"

Molly shook her head. "Not if you don't want to. Alphas aren't like Animagi, they don't have to be registered."

"Hermione, darling, this is all about you," Narcissa said calmly. "Whatever you want is all that matters."

"I can't... it's too soon." Hermione stood and moved towards the floo. "I can't be here. I can't deal with this, not today."

"Wait," Hannah said. "We should do something about the trolls out there."

"I'm not going out there, Hannah."

"No, not you," Hannah clarified. "One of us needs to clear them away."

"And if I go out there, they'll have a field day," Narcissa said. "They'll assume it has something to do with Draco and Hermione being together."

"Allow me," Ginny said and marched towards the door, yanking it open and slamming it behind her. Her voice was loud as she yelled, "The book shop is closed today and Ms Granger is unavailable for comment. So all you nosy mother-fucking trolls can just fuck right off."

Molly covered her face with her hands and Hannah burst out laughing.

"Yes," Narcissa said as she began to shake with silent laughter. "Ginny was probably best to clear them all away."

Ginny returned to the shop, a shit-eating grin on her face.

"Ginevra Weasley!" Molly pointed a finger at her daughter. "That was completely unnecessary."

"I disagree," Ginny objected. "They *are* trolls who have nothing better to do with their lives, and they *should* fuck off. Hermione is the same person she was yesterday, the same person she was a year ago. Her being an Alpha changes nothing."

"A year ago I wouldn't have hurt people like I just did," Hermione whispered. "I lost control and hurt people."

"No, you didn't," Molly assured her. "The spell you used was a simple static spark, it wouldn't have been enough to hurt a garden gnome, let alone a full-grown human."

"And they deserved it," Ginny said.

"No, they didn't," Hermione glanced at the windows and then quickly looked away. "They were just curious because someone—" she flicked her eyes to Narcissa. "—couldn't keep quiet."

"We don't know who told them," Molly said cautiously. "We can't place blame until we know for sure."

"It is possible," Narcissa began, "that my son was responsible."

"I've only told the people closest to me, Narcissa," Hermione said. "We may have spent some time together, and I am starting to trust *you* more, but Lucius and Draco are still far from being considered trustworthy."

"Lucius wouldn't dare say a word," Narcissa assured her. "I give you my own word on that. But my son..." she paused and took Hermione's hand, squeezing it gently. "Would you allow me to speak to him first?"

Chapter End Notes

As always, much thanks for reading and reviewing.

I'll be taking a 2 week break for the holidays, and then we'll be back to Friday updates.

Happy New Year to every one xx

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"Draco Lucius Malfoy."

"Circe's fucking tits!" Draco bellowed in surprise, grabbing the newspaper from the counter and covering his nakedness. Ironically, it was the previous day's paper and Hermione's furious face stared out at Narcissa and Lucius, their own expressions identical to hers.

"Lovely," Narcissa said and shook her head in disgust at her son. "Go and put some clothes on, Draco."

"Mother, I—"

"Now," Narcissa crossed her arms over her chest and arched an eyebrow, daring her son to defy her.

"And I suggest," Lucius added. "If you have company, that you ask her to leave immediately."

Draco opened his mouth to protest, but Lucius rapped his cane sharply on the floor.

"This is not a negotiation, Draco. You have two minutes."

Draco stared unbelievably at them, but realising they were serious, cursed under his breath and disappeared instantly.

"Narcissa, darling," Lucius began, his lips twitching. "Might I request that when you berate our son because of his indiscretions that you not associate my own name with his?"

"Well, if you would have allowed me to name him after my father, it wouldn't be an issue."

"Draco *Cygnus* Malfoy... really, darling? I stand by my decision."

"Then you will continue to be associated with his indiscretions."

Lucius chuckled and kissed her cheek.

"There have been no *indiscretions* for weeks," Draco snapped as he re-entered the room dressed in decidedly muggle clothes — sweatpants and a t-shirt. His feet were bare and his hair was sticking up every which way, but he didn't care. If his parents were going to show up unannounced, they would have to deal with him as he was.

"Well, that's a refreshing change," Lucius drawled, not even trying to hide his displeasure at his son's lifestyle.

Draco slumped into an armchair, stretching his legs out and crossing his arms over his chest. "Granger has fucked me over."

Narcissa sat on the sofa, glaring at him in annoyance, and waved her wand in the direction of the kitchen. Instantly boiled water poured into the teapot, which then floated across the room to land on the coffee table. Teacups followed, and Narcissa continued to glare at Draco while the cups filled.

"Hermione has done nothing of the sort," she finally said. "You have, however, fucked yourself over with your appalling manners and deliberate disregard for Hermione's feelings."

Draco's jaw dropped open. He couldn't recall a time that he had ever heard his mother curse, not even in her angriest moments when he'd pushed her to her limits when he was a child.

Lucius sat beside Narcissa and tossed the discarded newspaper onto the table. "Was that your doing?"

"Was *what* my doing?" He sat up slightly to look at the newspaper and frowned at the picture scowling back at him.

"Hermione's Alpha status has become headline news," Narcissa picked up the paper and landed it on Draco's lap. "Until yesterday, very few people knew about her, and I can assure you *none* of her friends have said a word to anyone about it. If it was you—"

"It *wasn't* me," Draco snapped. "I haven't even read this yet. I was working yesterday and I had planned to read it this morning, but was rudely interrupted."

"Well, let me give you the quick version," Narcissa's tone was sharp, causing Draco to flinch. "A source has revealed that Hermione Granger is an Alpha. The first female Alpha for two hundred years. A *source*."

"It *wasn't* me," Draco repeated. "Why would I tell those vultures that?"

"Revenge," Lucius said simply.

"Revenge?" Draco sat up, looking at his father as if he'd gone mad. "I have no reason to seek revenge against Granger."

"Did you not just say Ms Granger... *fucked you over*?"

"I did, but..." Draco watched as Granger in the picture huffed out an angry breath and stomped out of view. "I would never do that. I just meant..."

His eyes lingered on the now vacant picture and the unintentional metaphor seemed appropriate; his life had been empty since his interaction with Granger at the Manor.

Draco dropped the paper on the table and fell back into the chair, groaning and pressing the heels of his hands against his eyes and missing the concerned look that passed between his parents.

"Blaise," Draco muttered and dragged his hands away from his face. "I told Blaise."

"*Draco*," Narcissa chided, but seeing the distress on her son's face, she gentled her tone. "Why would you tell him?"

"I was pissed off, and he knew something was up when," Draco glanced between his parents. "when... when we were out, and I rejected every woman who approached me."

"So you told him, just like that?" Lucius asked. "Out in public where anyone could have heard you?"

"We were in a muggle pub, and Blaise couldn't tell anyone anyway, I had his word."

"Who else was with you?"

"Theo, but he was—" Draco picked up the paper again, and groaned when he saw the journalist. Gemma Farley. Theo had been pursuing Gemma for months. Draco's shoulders slumped and his face fell. "Shit. Theo was at the bar getting drinks, he must have heard the end of our conversation."

"Oh, *Draco*," Narcissa grimaced. "This *was* your doing."

"It wasn't intentional."

"Unintentional or not, this *has* come from you," Lucius nodded towards the newspaper. "You have caused her a great deal of stress."

Draco shot his father a disbelieving look.

"I am well aware, Draco, that this entire family has caused Ms Granger more stress in her life than she truly deserved, but this... You knew, as soon as you were able to understand, that the changes would occur in you. She had no idea, and is now not only dealing with those changes, she has to deal with them under public scrutiny."

"Why do you both even care?" Draco shrugged his shoulders, feigning ignorance, but he knew exactly why they were both concerned.

Granger was the ideal match for him. He knew it. They knew it.

But it wasn't that simple.

His and Granger's history was volatile, to say the least. And while they had been civil in recent times, their paths rarely crossed, and his interest in her was non-existent.

Until *that* morning.

The owl his mother sent *that* morning with a note that demanded he come to the Manor as soon as possible.

The sweet scent of lilacs and honey, and the warm spice of amber hitting him the second he stepped out of the floo.

The vision of her sitting in his childhood home, the rays of the afternoon sun falling on her and turning her into the angel that she was.

He had been shocked to see her there, but he knew in those first few seconds that she was his.

Her touch had been like nothing he'd felt before. The warmth of her caress across the most sensitive place on his skin had caused his stomach to clench with a heavy curl of arousal.

And when he held her, when he pressed his face against her skin...

She felt right.

She was the connection he'd been seeking.

But, her revelation — *I'm an Alpha. I'm the same as you* — had shocked him further.

His initial reaction had been one of pure lust, that he had found every Alpha's fantasy. An Omega. Submissive, compliant, with raging heats that were the stuff of whispered legend.

However, her scent in the air had held something else. Strength, confidence, intellect, and an alluring feminine purity he'd never scented before. A scent that certainly wasn't Omega.

He should have known before she even spoke the words — *Alpha. Like you* — that she was more than a mere Omega. She was too much of an enigma to be anything else but an Alpha, and far too brilliant to submit to anyone. And the fact that he had lied to her — *I don't want you* — had been tearing at his insides since he'd uttered the words.

He did want her. With every fibre of his being, he wanted her. And maybe his parents saw that.

"We care, Draco, because this girl... this *woman* is unlike anything the world has known," Narcissa said. "There have been female Alphas before now, but Hermione is exceptional."

"You seem very keen to get us together, Mother. Are you sure this is not some ploy to use her to improve the Malfoy name?"

"Yes, Draco, that's exactly it. We want this intelligent, confident, gorgeous woman to simply make the Malfoys respectable again," Narcissa snarked, sarcasm dripping in her voice.

Draco's eyes darted away, suddenly fascinated by the fireplace. "I'm not really interested in her."

Lucius and Narcissa looked at each other and began to laugh.

"What?" Draco asked in disbelief, as he returned his gaze to the two people before him who seemed to be masquerading as his parents.

"Draco, there are some things in life that you can hide or lie about. This is not one of them," Lucius explained when he stopped laughing. "And the control you've mastered over your emotions is impressive, however, since Ms Granger has made her presence felt in your life, your eyes have hardly remained their usual hue."

Draco blinked. "My eyes have..."

Narcissa leaned over and gently patted Draco's knee. "Darling, your eyes have been giving you away for weeks. They change colour at just the thought of her. Hermione's do the same."

"So now you have to decide," Lucius said. "Your attraction to Ms Granger is obvious, even if you don't want to admit it. But you cannot allow her to wait for you if you're not interested in her. It's not fair to her, and she has to be given the opportunity to move on with someone else if you don't wish to be with her. And whatever decision you make, you owe Ms Granger an explanation *and* an apology."

Draco's anger flared at his father's words; *move on with someone else*. The thought of someone else's hands on her, touching her, their mouth tasting her, their body joining with hers, filled him with a rage that burned his entire being.

"Draco, darling, I know this is a lot for you to take in, and no one ever expected this situation to occur, but please, just be honest with yourself," Narcissa sensed the anger in her son at Lucius' statement and calmed her tone. "Your father is correct. If you don't want to be with her, you need to tell her, but if you do, you need to get to know her. *More* than what you already do. She is an incredible woman, Draco, she will challenge you, and frustrate you, but given the chance, she will show you how true love is supposed to be."

"And you'd be okay with it?" Draco looked between his parents, "I mean, if I *was* interested in her... which I'm—"

He stopped short. They were both glaring at him.

"Have you not heard one word we've said?" Lucius pointed a finger at him. "You are lying to yourself and to her. You need to work your shit out, son, before it's too late."

Draco had been left in a daze when his parents had abruptly departed the previous morning. They had spoken to him as if he were a child, not the Alpha they had produced. And unfortunately they had been correct. He *was* lying to himself and to them. Granger was all he wanted.

He stared at her picture in *The Prophet*, and she glared back at him. It was his fault. He'd done this, he'd once more made her life hell.

He'd grown up knowing he would change. And despite the unwritten rules regarding the discussion of Alphas and Omegas, he proudly, arrogantly, flaunted his status. He'd loved the notoriety, loved having women — witches *and* muggles — fawn all over him. Loved the feeling of being able to dominate anyone who crossed his path.

But his belief that he would be the only Alpha in this generation was destroyed with the knowledge that he wasn't alone. However, since Alexander had kept his life out of the news, kept his head low and lived what Draco thought to be a dull existence with one woman, Draco had enjoyed the limelight.

But now he understood.

The infatuation, the dismissal of all others around him. The instant lust he felt when he was near her. He'd found that one person he couldn't imagine being without.

And then, without meaning to, he'd betrayed her.

But he hadn't been blameless.

Draco thought he could trust his friends with his life. Clearly that wasn't the case. He closed his eyes, thinking back to the conversation he'd had in the pub. Blaise had initially been surprised when he'd told him about Granger, but he'd listened and then shrugged, telling Draco that Granger had all the qualities of an Alpha, and in all honesty, no one should be shocked at her status. Theo had returned to the table with an overly smug expression on his face that had caused Draco to question what had happened at the bar, and Blaise to ask *how blonde was she?*

But now, Draco knew exactly what Theo had heard. He folded the paper neatly and turned it so Granger was no longer glaring at him. He would deal with her outrage later.

But now...

"Hey, Malfoy," Theo was cheery as Draco stepped through the floo into his living room. "It's a bit early on a Sunday morning for you, isn't it?"

"What the fuck is wrong with you?" Draco snapped and Theo's face dropped instantly.

"Draco, I've no idea—" Theo began but stopped short when Draco unfolded The Daily Prophet and held it up for him to see.

"You've no idea?" Draco snorted a laugh. "That's what you're going with? You've no idea?"

"This wasn't me, mate," Theo stood and took several steps back, putting some distance between them. "You're the one who told Blaise, maybe you should go and rant at him."

Draco's mouth curved into a devious grin. "Thanks for confirming that you heard our conversation. You could have kept denying it and maybe I would have believed you."

Theo's face flamed red as he realised his mistake. "No... I didn't... I wasn't... Blaise told me. It was all Blaise."

"You really are a fucking knob. Blaise was under an unbreakable vow, he couldn't tell anyone," Draco dropped the paper on the table and moved closer to him.

Theo's eyes darted to the cover, wincing as Hermione raised an eyebrow and looked at him with utter contempt.

"This was your chance, wasn't it?" Draco loomed over him causing him to cringe. "The rich as sin Farleys... makes perfect sense really. You've been chasing Gemma Farley for some time now. I'm sure giving her the scoop of the century gained you immeasurable favour."

"Draco, no! I... I... it was a slip-up. I never—"

"Just stop, Theo. You've pulled some low shit in your life, but this is despicable," Draco glared at him with disgust. "And I'll have you know, my parents seem to have fallen in love with Granger," He stepped closer to Theo and gripped the opening of his shirt in one fist, his voice dropping to little more than a snarl. "The Farleys might be rich as sin, but the Malfoys have them beat by quite a few million. My father is likely to purchase *The Prophet* and close it down for this stunt you've pulled."

Draco shoved him away, shaking his head.

"Draco, seriously, this was an innocent mistake—"

"Nothing you've ever done has been innocent," Draco turned and headed for the fireplace.

"You're one to talk about despicable stunts and fake innocence," Theo countered, but the waver in his voice gave away his bravado.

Draco paused and looked back over his shoulder. "I did, and said, the most despicable things possible. I treated people like shit. I was a bully and a bigot, and should be rotting in Azkaban. But fortunately for me, the people who I treated like shit looked past it all and forgave me my deplorable behaviour," He moved towards Theo. "The difference between me and you, Nott, is that I *know* I was an arsehole and have tried to amend my ways. You, however, cannot see past your own blood and are still living in an archaic past where you think deceit and cunning and tearing others down will further your status."

"So, you'd ruin your own status for a filthy, worthless, Mudblood?" Theo's voice cracked as Draco's anger surged and a wave of magic hit him in the chest, sending him stumbling backwards.

"Never, *ever* call her that again," Draco inhaled slowly, his jaw clenching as he fought to control his anger. "Hermione Granger is far superior to any pureblood bigot. You seem to have forgotten her role in the war. She was in part responsible for the downfall of the Dark Lord, which was no small feat when *we* were all cowering in fear of him," Draco laughed. "All his loyal followers were too scared to point out his faults, too scared to tell him that three teenagers had more brains, more talent, and more knowledge than him. We were pathetic. We deserved what happened."

"You're the pathetic one, Malfoy," Theo did little more than whimper.

"Oh, I'm pathetic, alright. In fact, I'll be so pathetic, it'll be embarrassing," Draco shook his head and huffed out a laugh. "Granger is going to be pissed, but I'll be more than happy to grovel at her feet. She's an Alpha, and she's more than capable of ripping the balls off any man who dares to betray her. You might have won favour with Gemma, but you might want to forget about how many rungs you think you've jumped in society joining the Nott and Farley fortunes together, because once Granger knows the truth, her worth won't be a question. Yours, however, will."

Draco crossed the room once more, stepping into the fireplace and pausing once more. He shook his head in disgust. "Don't bother turning up for work tomorrow, you're no longer needed."

Chapter End Notes

Two weeks off turned into three... my apologies.
Back on schedule now though :)

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"This is fucking ridiculous," Hermione said under her breath.

Ordinarily she'd be pleased that her shop was full of people. But when more than half of those people weren't even looking at the books, only at her, she was less than impressed.

She was behind the counter, Hannah on her left, Ginny on her right. The pair had become overly protective of her since the front-page news in *The Prophet*. Protection she told them she didn't need, but they had ignored her. She was just glad that Pansy's wedding was only two weeks away and she was busy keeping Harry from panicking, or she'd have all three of them with her.

"Maybe we should charm the door," Hannah suggested. "Only serious buyers will be allowed in."

"Unfortunately that won't help," Hermione sighed. "Anyone who genuinely wants to come in, but isn't exactly sure if they do want to buy something won't be allowed in either."

Hermione glanced around the shop and the faces that were staring at her looked away quickly as she glared at each of them.

It had been the same all week. For every person who actually bought a book, five others would simply come in to stare at her. Apparently the politeness regarding Alphas didn't extend to her.

"This *is* fucking ridiculous," she said again and then her jaw tightened. She pressed her hand to her throat, and her voice grew louder as she spoke. "Can I have everyone's attention please?"

The faces that weren't already looking at her turned her way.

"A show of hands, please. Who is here to actually buy books?" About a third of the customers' hands flew into the air. Hermione shook her head and moved around the counter to stand by the door. "Everyone else, please leave, you can take a good look at me as you walk past. Maybe I'll even grow another head as you do."

She glared as they began to walk past her, disgusted that the majority of them were men — men who wouldn't have even given her the time of day the previous week.

Shoving the door closed with a loud slam, Hermione brushed her hands together and returned to the counter where Hannah and Ginny were grinning at her.

"Well done, love!" A familiar voice in the back of the shop called before her two friends had the chance to congratulate her.

"Thank you, Mrs Bailey," Hermione called over her shoulder and then looked startled as the face belonging to the voice appeared over the top of the book stack, a stern expression on her face.

"I've told you, love, my name is Helen. And don't you let those rude bastards get you down."

"I won't, Mrs Bailey."

"*Ah*, Hermione?" A male voice interrupted them.

Hermione's head snapped around to look at him, and she was startled again.

"Oh, Cassius. Hello."

She noted that his shoulders relaxed and he let out a relieved breath — he'd clearly been nervous to approach her after her outburst. She also noted he had a book in his hand. She smiled. He wasn't here to just gawk at her.

"It looks like you made the right choice when you left the Ministry." He glanced around the shop. "You've got quite the place here."

"Thank you," she said. "I've worked hard to establish myself."

"I hope you're very proud, because you should be," Cassius said with an easy smile.

Ginny nudged Hermione with her knee, and Hannah circled the counter, not-so-subtly making eyes at Cassius' back as she walked behind him. Hermione wanted to slap them both for being so immature... no matter how right they were.

Cassius *was* attractive. Dark hair, cut short through the sides, and long and messy on top. Eyes the colour of milk chocolate, and flawless skin that Hermione was slightly jealous of. His t-shirt stretched across his chest, his biceps and forearm muscles taut and strong.

And while she had begun to maintain a semblance of control over the smells that were constantly around her, she instinctively inhaled a breath through her nose, drawing in the scent of him. Freshly sawn wood, dirt, and a hint of leather. It was warm and earthy, almost comforting, but none of it gave her the flutters in her stomach like Draco did.

"I'm very proud, thank you." Hermione nodded at the book regarding wand lore that he was holding, "You've switched professions too?"

Cassius placed the book on the counter. "Yeah, I'm apprenticing with Mr Ollivander. A stuffy Ministry career wasn't for me either."

"But he still plays Quidditch," Ginny chimed in and Hermione didn't understand why — she hated Quidditch and Ginny was well aware of the fact. "Fairly certain that was you who... *ah*... slipped off their broom two weeks ago."

Cassius laughed, "I vaguely remember a shock of red hair zooming past me just before that happened."

"Were you hurt?" Hermione asked, discreetly kicking Ginny in the ankle. Empathy was a female Alpha trait her friend was well aware of.

"No, the ref cast a cushioning charm below me just in time."

Hermione pointed at Ginny. "One of these days you'll end up headfirst on the ground during one of your games, and I'll tell you now, I'll laugh."

"It won't happen," Ginny said as she turned to help another customer. "I'm far too brilliant."

Cassius laughed and Hermione rolled her eyes. "Is there anything else I can help you with?"

"Actually, I was wondering if you had a copy of *Dragon Heartstrings and Unicorn Hair*?"

Hermione frowned. "That's a new edition, we don't carry those. Flourish and Blotts should have it."

"Oh... ah... yeah," Cassius nodded and his cheeks turned pink. "The thing is... that is, the reason I'm here... I was also wondering if you'd like to have dinner with me?"

Hermione's jaw dropped — that was the last thing she expected from him.

"*Oh... ah...* thank you, Cassius, but... *ah...*" Hermione paused in her stammering and took a breath. "Thank you, Cassius, that's very kind of you to ask me, but unfortunately I have to say no. It wouldn't be fair—"

The bell over the door sounded and the man who was the exact reason it wouldn't be fair walked in. Cassius followed her gaze and Hermione winced when she saw his expression. It was one of absolute horror. Asking an Alpha's mate out to dinner could have dire consequences for him, and he knew it.

"I'm so sorry," he mumbled and waved his wand over the crystal ball beside the cash register authorising the exchange of Galleons from his vault to hers. "I didn't realise..."

"Cassius, no, it's not—"

"It's fine, Hermione, I should have known." He grabbed the book, nodding to Draco as he all but ran from the shop.

Hermione sighed. Maybe she should have said *yes*, should have gone to dinner with him, explored a different option than the man who was being a complete arse and was now standing in her shop once more.

"Is there something you need, Malfoy?" Hannah's voice was sharp. "Because if there isn't, I'll happily make you some jewellery and kick your arse into the street."

Hermione laughed at the confused expression on his face, but asked the same question.

"What do you want, Malfoy?"

"I was wondering if I could have a few minutes of your time." He ran his hand across his mouth, his eyes still watching Hannah with apprehension. "There's something I need to... discuss with you."

Hermione was taken aback by his tone. The snarky edge she'd heard in his voice on his previous visit had vanished, and his trademark smirk was gone. He stood in front of her looking haggard, like he'd not slept for a week.

"Of course, what did you want to discuss with me?"

He glanced around. Ginny and Hannah were both still staring daggers at him. "I wonder if we might go somewhere more private."

Hermione drummed her fingers on the counter, well aware the remaining people in the shop had paused in their browsing to watch the exchange.

"Fine," she finally relented and stepped around the counter, indicating towards her office. "You've got five minutes."

"It'd only take ten seconds to turn his balls into earrings," Hannah muttered as they walked past.

"Excuse me?" Draco stopped and faced her. "Don't mumble, Ms Abbott, if you have something to say, please, by all means say it."

Hermione's heart did a little jump at the Alpha dominance. His expression had changed from calm to annoyed, and she could easily scent the hint of aggression that Hannah's words had set off.

Hannah balked slightly, her eyes widening in surprise for a split second before her face returned to stoic. "You're a complete douche, Malfoy. She's too good for you."

"I'm well aware of those facts, Ms Abbott, but if you'd keep your comments to yourself and allow me to speak with Ms Granger, maybe I could point them out myself when I apologise to her." He turned his back on her and nodded at Hermione. "Ms Granger, if we could speak, please."

Hermione bit the inside of her lip to stop her smile. Her eyes were most likely glowing, but a smile would have given him reason to be smug.

She led him to the back of the shop, well aware of the extra sway she put in her hips. Well aware of where his eyes were focused.

Silencing her office when she closed the door, she moved to sit behind her desk, crossing one leg over the other and leaning back in the chair. He waited until she was seated before unbuttoning his jacket and sitting himself.

"You wanted to speak to me?"

"Yes." He tugged nervously on his shirt cuff. "I need to clear a few things up. You'll probably hate me more than you already do, but that's my problem to deal with."

"Sounds ominous."

"The story in the Prophet—"

"So it *was* you?" Hermione sat up.

"Please let me explain." He held his hand up and she nodded, but her anger was simmering. "I didn't tell the journalist who wrote the story directly. But I was responsible for her finding out. I was out with some friends, one of whom is hotly pursuing her, and I wasn't cautious enough in my conversation."

Hermione frowned. "So you were just telling everyone about me and not caring who heard?"

Draco shook his head. "No. I only told one person and that was Blaise. He was completely under oath in regards to relaying our conversation to anyone, but Theo wasn't. He wasn't near us when we first started talking, and I can only assume he heard the tail end of our conversation."

"Theo's interested in the journalist?" Hermione asked and Draco nodded. "So if you knew that, and knew that he would tell her to win favour, why have the conversation with him around?"

"We're always cautious around him, conversation oaths are usually in place." Draco shook his head. "I wasn't concentrating, I was pissed off and I slipped up. And I'm sorry. I've caused you undeserved stress and attention that you didn't need, and I don't think I can ever apologise enough for doing so."

"So, essentially you *are* the reason I've been outed, as it were."

"I am." His mouth was fixed in a flat line, waiting for her tirade.

She stared at him, her anger still simmering, but she could see the genuine remorse in his face. The smugness that she always assumed was his resting expression was gone. His eyes were dark and heavy, and his nervous fidgeting — his hands constantly brushing his tie, his fingers tapping on his thigh — signified he was uncomfortable with what he had done.

"Draco, this is..."

Hermione was at a loss. She was furious with what he'd done. She wanted to yell, wanted to kick him out and tell him never to return. She had assumed it was a deliberate act, one to do exactly what he said; cause her stress and unwanted attention.

But his nervousness and his expression of guilt were unexpected. It could have been an act, but she instinctively knew he was being completely honest about what he'd done, and how sorry he was for doing it.

"Granger, this... situation has completely thrown me. And that's not an excuse for what I did, but there's not been a female Alpha in two hundred years, and I wasn't expecting one now."

"So, this is about your ego then?" Her anger won out at his statement. "I've taken the attention away from you, just like at Hogwarts. You walked in there not expecting to be outshone, especially by the likes of me, and now it's happening again. And you can't cope."

"That's not what I meant, I—"

"Do you think this has been easy for me? You knew what was ahead for you, but I had no fucking idea!" Hermione slapped her hand on her desk. "This is not my fault, Malfoy. If you hadn't opened your mouth, no one would have even known about me. You'd still be the page six playboy, you'd still have women hanging off you, but because that's no longer happening, you're blaming me. You had no control over becoming an Alpha, and neither did I, so the upset to your precious life isn't my doing."

She stood and rounded her desk, holding her arm out and indicating the door.

"You need to leave."

Draco nodded and moved towards the door. He paused before he opened it. "What did Cassius want?"

"Excuse me?" Hermione couldn't believe his nerve. "How is that any of your business?"

"He was obviously terrified when he saw me." Draco walked back towards her, stepping closer to her than what would be considered polite. "Did he ask you out?"

"Again, *not* your business."

"Did you agree to accompany him?"

She pursed her lips, refusing to answer, but noting the change in his eyes. The irises that had only ever lightened when he'd been in her presence were now a dark grey, the colour of a storm building over the ocean.

She sensed... jealousy.

He'd made it perfectly clear that he didn't want to be with her, but the possibility that she had accepted a dinner invite from another man was making him jealous.

Biting back a smirk, she moved closer to him, not touching him, but having to crane her head back to look up at him. The movement forced her chest out, and his eyes flicked to the opening of her shirt.

"And what if I did say *yes*? What if I've decided that Cassius *is* the man for me?" She flicked the tip of her tongue out to wet her lips. "I mean, there's no chance with you, is there? What was it that you said? *You're not who I want.*"

A muscle in his cheek twitched and he opened his mouth to respond. But Hermione pressed her index finger to his lips.

"Don't deny it, Draco. That's what you said." She smiled sweetly. "Right here in this office. You kissed me like I was the love of your life and then told me you didn't want me." She ran her finger across his jaw, trailing it down the side of his neck to the sensitive gland beneath his collar. "Then you touched me here and told me no other man would want me. But since that day, I've lost count of how many men have asked me to dinner. They've been falling all over themselves to get close to me. So, I guess you were wrong."

"You won't be happy with him. You won't be happy with any of them."

Hermione smiled again. He was trying to control his temper. His chest was rising and falling heavily with each slow breath he took, and his eyes had darkened to ink.

"Maybe I will be. Maybe Cassius *is* the one. He's very attractive, and so polite, and maybe I can make him become my own little Omega." She dragged her bottom lip between her teeth. "Because that's what you wanted, wasn't it, before I came along and ruined your life? You wanted a woman who you could own, who you could dominate."

Draco's hand curled around the back of her neck, and he leaned in, running his nose along her jaw. "I think that's what *you* want, Granger. A man who will take charge." His tongue licked slowly over her gland and she sucked in a shaky breath. "One who will dominate you. One who will make you see stars, and then have you begging for more." His tongue crossed her gland again and she bit her lip to suppress her moan. "He won't do that. Not for an Alpha. An Alpha needs more than dinner invitations and sweet, sentimental gestures. An Alpha needs to be satisfied."

Her own hand came up to curl into the silken hair at the back of his head. "And that's why I said no to dinner with him." She yanked his head back and grinned. "Jealousy suits you, Malfoy."

His jaw dropped open, his eyes going wide with surprise. "You what?"

"I told him no. I'm not interested in him." She smoothed her hands across the front of his suit jacket and took a step back, putting some much needed distance between them. "But your apology was rubbish. You're not the victim here, Malfoy. Yes, my status was unexpected, but you're the one who has the issues with it, not me."

She retreated to her chair, swallowing hard and trying to keep her emotions in check. He smelled delicious, and she wasn't lying when she said jealousy suited him. It was the sign she wanted, the sign she needed. He *did* want her.

But she wouldn't simply appease him, and she was still furious at him for what he'd done. He would have to work to earn her trust.

"If you want me, Malfoy, prove it," she dared him. "Show me what a true Alpha male is. Show me that I can trust you. Show me that my being an Alpha isn't an issue. If you can do that, then maybe we," she waved her hand between them, "could become something."

He opened his mouth and closed it again, then stared at her for the longest time. His eyes slowly changed, the bright blue bleeding back into the ink. Finally, he nodded and smiled — a genuine smile, not the smirk she was accustomed to seeing.

"That sounds reasonable." He nodded once more. "I hurt you and in doing so, I've lost the sliver of trust I may have had." He leaned down and placed his palms on her desk. "But know this, Ms Granger. Once I've decided I want something, nothing will stop me from getting it."

He stood and straightened his tie, all the while holding her gaze. He moved towards the door, paused before opening it, and glanced back at her. He smiled once more, it was still not a smirk, but Hermione sensed that she had just become prey.

Chapter End Notes

I just wanted to apologise to everyone for that fact I've not responded to all the amazing comments and reviews I have received for this story. When I'm not writing, I run my own business which takes up my entire life. So, please let me say a huge THANK YOU to everyone who has taken the time to read this so far, and I also appreciate that you have taken the time to comment on my work xx

Chapter 12

"Does this mean you trust me now?"

Much to his surprise, Draco was on his back with Hermione hovering over him, her legs splayed wide over his hips. It was a sight he'd only dreamed of, and of course in his dreams, he always took control. But watching her over him, watching her eyes turn golden, he knew he wanted to feel her, to be covered in her, and he gave up his need for control without hesitation.

"Trust is a strong word, Draco." Hermione's expression was one of pure lust. "I'm not sure if I do trust you yet, but I need this," she leaned down and pressed her face to his neck, inhaling deeply, "I *want* this. I can't function without your scent."

"It's the same for me." Draco's hands gripped her hips. "Since my very first scenting of you, I've thought of nothing else."

"I think about you all the time." Hermione looked up at him with a dark intensity that made his stomach clench. "I think about your tongue, how it would feel on each gland." She lifted off his chest, and spread her legs wider, and without breaking her gaze on his face, she took his hand and pressed it to the inside of her thigh.

Draco's skin seemed to tighten, his body reacting to the scent of her and the smooth feel of her skin.

"I wonder what it would feel like to have you inside me." Hermione moved against his hand, closing her eyes and sighing deeply as his fingers touched the sensitised gland. "It's how I thought it would feel. Your hands on me... your body beneath me... your scent surrounding me."

Draco slipped his fingers higher, touching her most intimate place for the first time. She was soft, and warm, and so wet. He could hardly believe this was happening. Just a week ago, she would have happily frozen his balls for revealing her status, but now...

She gasped as he pushed one finger inside the slick warmth between her thighs. Her body tightened and her eyes flew open, and she stared down at him.

"Okay?"

Hermione nodded and sucked in a breath as he added another finger and began to slide them slowly in and out of her.

"Draco," she breathed, "I didn't think it... would... feel..."

Her words were a series of broken thoughts, and Draco watched transfixed as the babbled words fell from her lips.

"Draco, I need..."

"Tell me, darling." Draco curled his fingers inside her and her breath caught. "Tell me what you need."

"I need..." she pressed her palms to his chest, lifting her hips and glancing down between them. "I need you inside me."

"I *am* inside you." Draco's fingers dragged over the soft place within her that caused her to shiver. "Are my fingers not enough?"

"No, I need..." she gasped. "I need... more."

He pressed his thumb against her clit and she cried out sharply. "Was that enough, darling?"

"No, it's not—" She wailed again as his fingers curled and his thumb pressed down. "Draco... more."

She grasped his wrist, dragging his hand away from her body, shuddering as his fingers slipped from her core. "Help me?" she pleaded and Draco reached between them, holding himself up for her. Her eyes met his and she lowered her hips, the very tip of him touching the place where his fingers had just been.

He thrust his hips up, just as Hermione sank down over him and whispered his name

"Granger," he groaned and the stars he promised he'd make her see danced in his vision. In just minutes, he was falling.

"*Granger!*" Draco's cry was a relieved shout, his pleasure spilling wet and hot all over his stomach. His teeth were clenched, his back a sharp arc, his hand gripping the knot at the base of his twitching cock.

His eyes snapped open and he stared at the ceiling. He was alone. She wasn't here, she wasn't naked and riding him.

"*Fuuuuck,*" he groaned and looked down at the mess on his stomach. Well, the mess that was there *again*.

The dreams, waking up hard, coming all over himself — it never went away. And it didn't matter how many times he wanked during the day, every morning was the same.

Two months had passed since their encounter at the Manor. Two fucking months of rejecting women, of no sex, of erotic fantasies about the one woman he tried to convince himself he didn't want. But the truth was, he no longer believed the lie - he *did* want her. Had wanted her from the moment he scented the lilacs, the amber, and the honey.

And the scent of her arousal was unlike anything he'd ever known. It was spice. It was sweet. It was the most intoxicating aroma he had ever known. No other woman had ever drawn him in as she had.

He sat up, rubbing his hands across his face and glancing around the room, as if she would appear out of nowhere.

He shook his head and groaned.

Why couldn't it have been anyone but Granger? She was smart, she was shrewd. She was fearless. She proved over and over again that she could hold her own with anyone — especially him. And in the rare times they had interacted in the past few years, she had barely acknowledged him. He was usually afforded a curt nod and a sharp hello, and that was it.

But that was all he deserved, he supposed.

He stood under the shower, scrubbing the mess from his skin. Closing his eyes, he ducked his head under the water and a vision of twelve-year-old Hermione Granger flashed through his mind.

'At least no one on the Gryffindor team had to buy their way in. They got in on pure talent.'

'No one asked your opinion, you filthy little Mudblood.'

His stomach lurched at the memory. Even back then, she'd stood up to him. And she'd been right. His father *had* paid for his place on the team. Yes, he had been able to fly a broom well, but he also knew there were better Quidditch players than him.

And his use of *that* word.

Draco swallowed hard. It had been more than ten years, but his use of the term disgusted him. It had been childish and pathetic. He had been embarrassed by her calling him out, so he had said the worst thing possible.

His Slytherin mates congratulated him, of course they did, and his twelve-year-old self loved the notoriety of having said the ugly word to her. But attention was something he constantly had. He was a Malfoy. His name meant power and prestige. But his name also meant bigotry and hatred. At the time, he didn't see it as that. He'd been raised to believe his kind were superior, were pure, were beyond reproach.

But, of course, he hadn't been. He had been shown up by the exact type of person he had been told was beneath him — a muggle-born witch with more talent than any pureblood he had ever known.

And he had hated her, hated being second to her. He hated being second to anyone, but with her, it had boiled his blood. He was smart in his own right and had been taught spells and charms since he could understand them. He could brew the most complicated potions before he even started classes at Hogwarts. And he should have finished top of the class. But instead, because of her, he finished second every year.

It was why he lashed out like he did. Belittling her had been the only way he could make himself feel superior to her. She hadn't grown up in the Wizarding World, so she hadn't known the derogatory term, and he'd used it to his advantage. He would stare her down and mouth the word when no one else was looking. He took every opportunity to point out her flaws and had been relentless in his mocking of both Potter and Weasley to simply piss her off.

But she'd shown a fearless defiance that he'd never experienced, ignoring the snide remarks, then calling him out again when the Hippogriff knocked him down.

Draco huffed out a laugh. In hindsight, he'd been fortunate that it was only the beast that attacked him; if Granger hadn't been restrained, he would have been hexed into oblivion.

And deservedly so.

His behaviour had been deplorable. Even after she'd attended the Yule Ball, dressed in blue and looking like she would fit right in at any pureblood social gathering, he still treated her like crap. She had been the brightest light in the room and had managed to take his breath away — not that he would have admitted it at the time.

Another thing he would never have admitted when he was younger? The biggest shock of his life had come when he was called to cross the courtyard at the Battle of Hogwarts, and he saw empathy on her face. She had been the only member of the Order who looked at him and seemed to know exactly what he felt.

Absolute terror.

But it was the empathy he'd seen that he was now clinging to. It gave him hope that even after he had totally screwed up, she might actually forgive him.

He had to fix what he had done.

And despite his bravado in her office, he had no idea where to start.

Draco stared at the black wooden door in front of him, the number on it seeming to mock him. It had once been the home of his mother's aunt and she had spent days here as a child. He had also spent time here, although not as a child.

His time had been more recently.

He'd been a little more than surprised when Pansy began dating Potter. The animosity between all of them during their school years was something he thought they'd never overcome, but he was wrong.

Pansy and Potter were less than a fortnight away from being married — a thought which just two months ago would have made him cringe, but was now the one thing he couldn't get off his mind.

Draco also never thought he would ever consider Potter a friend.

He knocked on the door — the floo was blocked and had been for a week now — and waited. He heard a loud curse, followed by thumping footsteps, and then Pansy yelling, "Who the fuck is it?"

The door flew open. Potter looked somewhat disheveled and Pansy was scowling behind him.

"Am I interrupting?"

"Oh, Malfoy." Potter's face turned beet red and Pansy rolled her eyes.

"You are, actually," Pansy huffed, untwisting her shirt and pulling it down.

Draco smirked. "This is why you closed off the floo? Some alone time before the wedding?"

"This had better be important, Draco." Pansy gestured for him to come inside and closed the door behind him.

"It is, actually. I'm here about Granger." They both gaped at him, and he nodded. "You both know her well, and I need some... *ah*... advice."

"I was going to offer you coffee," Pansy began, leading them into the living room, "but we might need something stronger."

"It's little early to be drinking, isn't it?" Draco asked as three tumblers appeared on the coffee table, accompanied by a bottle of Jameson.

"Not for this conversation."

Pansy poured three drinks, then sat beside Harry and leaned into his side. His hand went to her thigh and a pang of jealousy curled in Draco's chest. They were so natural together, moving in sync without a thought.

"Why'd you tell The Prophet?" Harry asked. "You've done some dumb shit in your life, but that was possibly the dumbest thing you've ever done."

"Have you spoken to Granger?"

"We have."

"So you know it wasn't deliberate."

"It doesn't really make a difference," Pansy said. "She didn't want anyone to know, and now everyone does. The shop is constantly swarmed with people just gawking at her, and she's

had to fend off more men than you could even imagine. Her business is suffering because her usual customers are staying away because of the crowds, and she can't even come out with us girls anymore for fear of being hit on by every man who sees her. And it's all your fault."

Draco glanced between them, his anger flaring at the thought of other men going near her. "Yeah, you're right. It *is* my fault, and that's why I'm here."

"You don't expect us to fix this, do you?" Harry gave him a look filled with so much contempt, Draco winced.

"No, this is my mess. But, after speaking with her — and apologising — she threw down the gauntlet. Told me to man up, to show her what a true Alpha is."

"Ah... you're the only Alpha in the room," Pansy pointed out. "Not sure how we can help you."

Draco shifted in his chair, uncomfortable that he had to ask these two for help. He was an Alpha, for Zeus' sake. It was easy, he could have any woman he wanted. He just had to swoop in and lay on the charm. Of course, that wouldn't work with Granger. Her own Alpha status meant little; it was the fact it was *her* that made him nervous. She was Hermione Granger and knew him all too well. A simple smile would be of no use.

He had to prove himself to her. Had to show her he wasn't just some cad who liked to flaunt his status. Had to show her that from the second he scented her, he knew.

"Granger won't fall for grand gestures and expensive gifts," Draco finally said. "And I've no idea how to prove myself to her. I need help."

"This is serious." Pansy glanced at Harry, all the snark leaving her voice, but Harry was still eyeing him warily.

"So, this isn't some kind of ploy to just make the front pages? It's not just so you can brag about scoring with the only female Alpha for centuries?"

"Absolutely not." Draco shook his head and then looked at Pansy. "What has she told you about all of this? The Alpha stuff, I mean."

"Only what she knows." Pansy shrugged. "She can smell stuff and hear stuff that we can't. She said you two had... a moment at the Manor. Something about scenting."

Draco nodded. "That *moment* told me everything I needed to know. The second I scented her..." he sighed and an almost reverent smile crossed his face. "I've never known anything like it. She was... I can't even describe it."

"Draco..." Pansy began cautiously, watching as his eyes changed colour. The dark grey storm was turning to a brilliant sapphire. Hermione had mentioned it, but it was a marvel to witness. "What are you saying?"

"I haven't even looked at another woman since this all happened. I'm not interested in anyone else. Only her. She's..." He paused, searching for the right words. "...she's incredible. She's

everything."

"It's been, what... two months since this happened, and you're only realising now just how amazing she is?" Harry still didn't look convinced.

"And I'm an idiot for not noticing her before," Draco told him. "Her Alpha status is irrelevant. I don't want her just because of that. I want her because she *is* amazing."

"Her being an Alpha *isn't* irrelevant. You probably still wouldn't have noticed her if she wasn't one."

"True," Draco conceded. "And yes, the only reason I did notice her was because of the Alpha scent, but that's irrelevant *now*. Her being an Alpha isn't what I see. I see her. And I'm sorry I didn't until now."

Harry still looked sceptical.

Draco stared straight at him. "I know you're concerned about her, especially with me. Our history is not great, but this is definitely *not* about her being an Alpha and my *wanting to score with her*. I don't know what she's told you when it comes to me, but I know that when it comes to her, I can't stand not being near her. I dream about her, my every thought is about her, and only her. And it wasn't a slow realisation. It was instant. The second I stepped out of the floo in the Manor, I was taken," he paused, his eyes flaring the brightest blue. "She had me."

Harry finally smiled. "Okay then. You're serious about this. What do you need from us?"

"I've no idea how to do this."

"You're with a different woman every week!" Pansy laughed, making him scowl.

"Not *every* week. And not since..." Draco shook his head, none of it mattered anymore. All that mattered was her. "Where do I start? Like I said, I don't imagine expensive gifts would win her over, and she has her own book shop, so sending her books is pointless."

"You're so stupid," Pansy chuckled. "Why do men always assume we want gifts?"

"What then?"

"Attention," Harry said. "Go and see her. Talk to her. Take her to lunch. Show some interest in her."

Pansy kissed Harry's cheek and then smirked at Draco. "I got a good one."

"Whatever." Draco rolled his eyes and slumped back in the chair. "It can't be that simple, not with Granger."

"It really is, Malfoy. Hermione isn't as complicated as you think. She likes books, and she keeps up with laws regarding the rights of magical creatures." Harry grinned. "She's fascinated with potion making."

"Potion making?" Draco sat up.

Harry nodded. "Yeah, she always felt she could have pursued it, but her love of books and her want to help lesser magical creatures won out."

"So, now you have an opening," Pansy said. "You could take her to lunch and ask her opinion about... I don't know... the latest developments in hiccoughing potions."

Harry snorted a laugh, and Draco shook his head.

"Hiccoughing potions? Really, Pans?" He chuckled.

"It made you both laugh, so try it with her."

"Maybe, but I don't think taking Granger to lunch is wise. The publicity would be worse than what she's already dealing with."

"So take lunch *to* her. Something simple..." Harry suggested with a smug grin. "She loves Molly's potato and leek soup. I'm sure if you ask nicely, Molly will make you some to take to her."

"I hate you, Potter," Draco muttered and Harry laughed.

"And you should probably start calling her Hermione," Pansy added. "It is her name after all, *and* we're no longer in school."

"No," Draco said firmly, and Pansy smiled as his eyes lightened once more. "She's Granger. She always has been, and she always will be. I *won't* call her anything else."

"Okay, but you definitely owe her some kind of public apology," Pansy told him. "She's had so much unwanted attention, you need to do something to make them all back off."

"How the fuck do I do that without making it sound like I've claimed her?" Draco threw his hands in the air. "She'll hate me more than she already does if everyone thinks that."

"Well, since Theo screwed you over, and in turn Hermione, how about an exclusive interview in Wizingard Britain's favourite magazine?"

"That's what got me into this mess in the first place, Pans. I can't see how an interview would help. She'd probably *Avada* me and dance on my ashes."

"Draco, I love you, but you're an idiot. *I'll* do the interview. We'll make sure you get it across that she's to be left alone, that she should be shown the same respect as you and Alexander. That she's an Alpha, not an Omega, and she'll hex the fuck out of any man if he dares touch her."

Both men looked at Pansy, who simply smiled at them.

"How is it that you all seem to forget what my job is?"

She'd been a writer for Witch Weekly since finishing school. Her opinion pieces were not to be missed — the spike in male readers grew exponentially when word got out that few subjects were off limits for Pansy Parkinson. But unlike Theo, they all trusted her not to spill their secrets to the world. And she'd never betrayed that trust.

Draco nodded slowly, an idea of his own forming in his head.

"It could work, Draco." Pansy was watching him as he mulled over her idea. "People would back off, and I know Hermione would be grateful for that. She lost her shit last week when that story broke, so I think you owe it to her to try."

"Mother said she'd never seen anything like it," Draco explained, remembering the expression of awe on his mother's face as she'd relayed the incident. Draco was able to perform wandless magic owing to his Alpha status, but what Narcissa had described would have put fear into the Dark Lord himself.

"So you know what she's capable of then." Harry leaned forward. "Do this for her, Draco, and I can guarantee you'll see a different Hermione Granger. One that might just give you a chance."

Draco's memory reference:

Rowling, JK. Harry Potter and The Chamber of Secrets. Bloomsbury, 1998. Pg 117

Chapter 13

Sitting quietly in the last row of chairs, Hermione glanced around her. The setting was stunning — a beautifully restored Georgian mansion with sprawling gardens — and it was in the wooded forest at the edge of those gardens where the ceremony would be held. The ground was covered with fallen autumn leaves, forming a natural aisle for Pansy to walk down. Fairy lights had been scattered throughout the trees, and a simple wooden arch, draped with a fine, gauzy fabric and a simple arrangement of dark pink and white flowers, stood at the front of the rows of wooden chairs.

The massive English oaks made for the perfect cover — the prying eyes of the media would be hard pressed to see anything beneath the greenery. The Chosen One's wedding had been big news and speculation was rife as to exactly what was planned. Even Pansy's bosses at *Witch Weekly* had been given the brush off.

Although, Harry *had* slipped up and told her they had moved the ceremony's original setting from the terrace to the forest to make *her* less of a target for the trashy gossip writers. Hermione had protested, but Harry insisted that the new location was even better than the original.

And Hermione had to agree. Harry and Pansy had chosen the perfect place.

"Hermione?"

She turned to see Harry, and then winced as the scent of Ron hit her. She pressed her fist to her nose and mouth, and looked apologetically at Ron.

"It's okay," Ron said as he walked towards the archway. "I'll stand over here and yell."

Hermione laughed and lowered her hand. She cast a masking charm and the freshness of the outdoors and the earthy aromas of the forest dulled it somewhat, but the smell still lingered.

"Thank you, Ron. And one day I'll be able to be near you again," Hermione told him as she turned to Harry. "Look at you."

Harry smiled his familiar awkward smile, and she stood from her seat to give him a hug.

"Are you ready for this?"

He nodded. "*So* ready. But why are you so early?"

"I wanted a seat in the back. I wasn't sure how I'd react to Ron..." she shot her friend another apologetic smile, "and I didn't want everyone's eyes on me."

"They'll all see you as they walk in," Ron pointed out.

"Yeah, but during the ceremony, they all have to face forward, and if I'm sitting up there—" she nodded towards the front, "—they'll be watching me and not Pansy. So, if I sit back here, it would be considered rude if they were turning to look at me, wouldn't it?"

"You're too smart, do you know that?" Harry laughed. "It hadn't even occurred to me that people would be watching you."

"You've had other things to worry about. And this is just easier for everyone."

"But I hate that you'll be in the back."

"Harry, it doesn't matter where I sit as long as I'm here. This is yours and Pansy's day, I don't want to take anything away from it."

Harry hugged her. "And you won't."

"What the hell happened to us?" Ron asked with a laugh. "Gryffindors are supposed to hate Slytherins. And here we are, me and Daph, Harry and Pans, you and Malf—"

"I'm not with Draco."

Ron smirked. "Not yet."

"Not ever."

Harry chuckled. "Yeah, *not ever*. Riiight."

Hermione looked at her two friends. "What are you saying? Just because we're both Alphas, we should be together?"

"That's part of it," Ron said with a shrug. "But the two of you are more suited than any of us."

"He's right," Harry agreed. "The two of you should have been together since we were in school."

"Well, not *while* we were in school," Ron winked at her. "Maybe just after."

Hermione smiled at him. "What was that you said about 'like kissing your sister'?"

Harry snorted and Ron's cheeks flushed pink.

"It was just weird," Ron replied. "And anyway, you and Malfoy. It would have been the perfect end to the war. The Pureblood Prince and the Muggleborn Princess, bringing an end to the blood divide."

"Romeo and Juliet, if it ever was," Harry said.

"Romeo and Juliet ended up dead," Hermione reminded him.

"Yes, but they died *together*, madly in love."

"And had you and Malfoy gotten together during school, not after, you both probably would have ended up the same way." Ron puffed out his chest comically. "I saved your lives."

"Yeah, you're a real hero." Harry rolled his eyes and laughed. "But seriously, Hermione, you and Malfoy? I know he's been busy flaunting himself to the world, but the two of you are more suited than any couple I know."

"So you're saying I should just fall at his feet?"

"Shit no!" Ron chortled. "Make that bastard work for you. He should fall at *your* feet, worship the bloody ground you walk on. And, as a bonus, it'll be entertaining for the rest of us to watch."

"So, you wouldn't have an issue with it?" Hermione glanced between her two friends. "If something were to happen between us?"

"I'm marrying Pansy Parkinson today," Harry reminded her and then nodded towards Ron. "And do you remember a year ago when the rotting corpse married Daphne Greengrass?"

Ron lifted his middle finger towards Harry and then focused on Hermione. "You ask us as if we have any say in it. You will do what you want, Hermione, you always have. You are strong and intelligent, and if Malfoy can keep up with you, then he at least deserves a chance. Besides, I think you've already made up your mind."

"Ron's right," Harry said. "You like him more than you're willing to admit." He held his hand up, stopping her question. "Your eyes are almost golden. And you're just talking about him."

"Fine, I might have told him if he can act like an Alpha, not a spoiled brat, there might be a chance with me."

"Yeah, he said as much when he came to ask me and Pansy how to win you over," Harry informed her, laughing at her shocked expression. "But I can't talk about that now, guests are arriving."

Hermione ignored the sideways glances as the wedding guests began to arrive. She kept her eyes straight ahead, watching Harry and Ron, occasionally glaring at them as Ron laughed silently.

Harry's revelation that Draco had confided in him and Pansy was quite the shock. Draco going to them, asking them for help, was completely unexpected. She assumed he would have no issues in wooing any woman, but it seemed he was wary when it came to her.

She was anxious to know what they had talked about. What had he asked? What had they told him? She was certain Harry wouldn't give anything away, and Pansy would be cautious, but she wondered just how invested they were in seeing two Alphas together.

And what were Draco's plans? She'd not seen him since he admitted he was the reason her status became known. The words he had spoken — *I always get what I want* — and the predatory look on his face when he left her office had become part of her nightly fantasies. She had assumed he would be relentlessly pursuing her. But he'd not been seen. Anywhere. Even Narcissa had told her she'd scarcely seen him.

And it was making Hermione nervous.

"Is this seat taken?"

Hermione looked up to see a man she didn't know smiling down at her. She rolled her eyes at the look of hopeful lust on his face.

"Actually it is," Hannah spoke from behind him and virtually shoved him out of the way. "This is a wedding," she hissed quietly at him and sat beside Hermione. "Not a fucking nightclub. Now move away."

The man — Hermione assumed he must have been a relative of Pansy's — stumbled away, a look of sheer terror on his face.

Neville flanked his wife, shaking his head at the retreating man. "What's wrong with people?"

"They're arseholes," Ginny said, taking the seat on Hermione's other side, Nikolai sitting beside her and nodding in greeting at Hermione.

"They give you trouble?" he asked, his thick accent making his voice more menacing than it really was. "You need me to... how you say? Take him out?"

Hermione laughed. Her friend had found her perfect match — Nikolai was charming and sweet, but he also didn't take any crap.

"No, it's fine, Nikolai, thank you. He's the only one who's approached me."

"So far," Hannah said, glaring at anyone who dared to even glance in their direction.

"You don't have to sit here with me." Hermione nodded towards the front rows. "I'm only sitting back here so I don't distract from Pansy."

"Smart," Neville chuckled. "But we're not moving. Who knows who else will try it on with you?"

Hermione's spine tingled and she sat up straight. Argan, vanilla, and rainforest; the aroma overpowering everything else around her.

Draco had arrived.

Narcissa and Lucius stopped to say hello, but Draco simply gave her a single nod and moved to stand with Blaise. Hermione bit back her smile when he repositioned himself so he could see her over Blaise's shoulder.

"Ms Granger," Lucius began, glancing at Draco and shaking his head. "If you would be so kind as to slap some sense into my son this evening, I would be forever grateful."

Hermione laughed. "Oh, I have an entire team here with me. One of us will surely have the opportunity."

They moved along the aisle, taking their seats several rows in front of her. Draco and Blaise joined them, and Hermione grimaced. Her plan — an early arrival, the idea to sit in the back so there were no distractions from Pansy and Harry — had failed. She'd not anticipated Draco sitting just a few rows in front of her. Distracting *her*.

Her focus had already shifted; he was hard to miss. His presence was strong, and she felt the sense of awe in almost everyone around her, whether they were aware of it or not. He commanded attention just being there. She'd not really had to concern herself with taking attention away from anyone — he did it without even trying.

But people simply glanced at him then looked away, and no further discussion was had, whereas she had brought attention to herself by arriving early.

"Is Draco's life in danger?" Ginny whispered. "You look like you're about to hex him."

Hermione turned to her, and Ginny startled, her eyes going wide.

"What?" Hermione asked quietly.

"Your eyes are almost black."

"Shit," Hermione cursed under her breath and dropped her head. Just what she needed, *more* attention.

"Just ignore him." Hannah leaned closer, keeping her voice low. "Just focus on Harry and Pansy."

Hermione nodded and Hannah squeezed her hand. She'd been with Hermione on more than one occasion when she began to lose control of her emotions. And after Hermione's freak out in the shop, Hannah had become adept at calming her down.

She breathed slowly, Hannah's hand anchoring her. Ginny took her other hand and nodded when Hermione looked up at her.

"It's okay. You can avoid him. We'll stay with you," Ginny assured her.

"It's not him. It's me. I'm angry at myself," She shook her head as Ginny began to ask why. The celebrant was asking them to stand.

Daphne made her way down the aisle first, and Hermione smiled as Ron winked at his wife when she stood opposite him.

Pansy was glowing as she walked past them. A tiny frown flickered across her face and Hermione could see the question in her head: why were they all in the back row?

Hermione was asking herself the same thing.

She could have arrived with the other guests and minimal attention would have been paid to her. Instead, having done what she did, everyone had noticed her.

She shook her head, angry at herself for being so blindly stupid, and returned her gaze to her friends.

Harry was beaming as Pansy walked closer, her father kissing her cheek and shaking Harry's hand.

Hermione watched, but it was like a dream. She couldn't concentrate; her eyes kept flicking back to Draco. His scent was everywhere, so much so that it masked the deathly aroma that surrounded Ron. And as hard as she tried, she couldn't ignore it.

The ceremony was a blur. *I do's* were spoken, rings exchanged, declarations made, and kisses kissed. But she could barely take her eyes away from the blond head three rows in front of her.

As they all stood while Harry and Pansy walked back down the aisle, Hermione's gaze remained on Draco. The smiles and laughter that rang out from the other guests was nowhere to be seen on him. He was watching Ron with a scowl on his face. Blaise touched his shoulder, whispering something, but Draco shook his head and his scowl deepened.

She sensed something similar to his jealousy in her office, but it was deeper, heavier, almost a mistrustful rage.

Had something happened between them that she'd not heard about? She thought they were better acquainted now, but had she been misled? Were they still at odds with each other?

Hermione's protective instincts flared — her friend was possibly in danger of being set upon by an angry Alpha — and as if sensing her anger, Draco's head snapped around to look at her.

Their eyes met, and she saw it. The same lust she was feeling was reflected back in his angry eyes. The ceremony had been as tough for him as it had been for her. She groaned internally and looked away.

This was going to be a long night.

Hermione stepped out of the ladies room and smiled politely at the man leaning back against the wall.

"Hermione," he said in a smooth voice and she rolled her eyes. She should have taken Hannah up on her offer to accompany her to the toilet.

"Hello, Michael," she said dryly and shook her head. Michael Corner, yet another classmate from Hogwarts who showed no interest in her while they were there. In fact, he'd dated Ginny for a few weeks, but hadn't even given Hermione even a sideways glance.

He pushed off the wall and shot her what she assumed was supposed to be a dazzling smile. "Are you enjoying the wedding?"

"Very much so." She moved to step around him, but he blocked her path. She glowered at him. "And if you don't mind, I'd like to get back to enjoying myself."

"*Enjoying* yourself, huh?" He moved closer to her and she could sense the overconfidence in him. "I can certainly help with that."

Hermione rolled her eyes. He was just one more male who assumed she was his for the taking.

"I really don't need your help, Michael," Hermione said more politely than he deserved. He was crowding her and it wasn't wise to do so.

"Oh, come on, Hermione. There's so much more enjoyment to be had if we leave early." He traced a fingertip up her arm and moved to touch the scent gland on her neck.

She slapped his hand away. "Don't fucking touch me."

He looked startled for a split second and then his face turned into something more sinister. "Did you just assault an Auror?"

"No, I just told a man to stop touching me."

"That's not how I saw it, but there's a way to stop me from reporting it. And I know your kind like to be dominated." He smirked and lifted his hand to grip her shoulder tightly.

But that was as far as he got.

Hermione's muttered *Flipendo* hit him in the chest and he flew backwards into the wall with a heavy thud.

"I'm not an Omega, you brainless imbecile," she fumed. "And if you would have taken the slightest interest in me at school, instead of just using me to get information on Ginny, you would have been aware that I don't need a wand to do magic."

"You'd assume an Auror would be more prepared," a cool voice said from behind her.

Hermione spun around. "What do you want?"

"Absolutely nothing." Draco held his hands up in surrender. "I saw him follow you out, and since he's been ogling you all night, I thought I'd follow him."

"I don't need you to rescue me."

"Of course you don't." Draco squatted beside Michael. "But now you have a witness to the actions of a disrespectful piece of shit, whose bosses would love the chance to rid the department of." Draco tapped Michael's cheek and lowered his voice. "Your reputation is well known, Corner, and you're lucky Ms Granger didn't put you *through* the wall instead of simply slamming you into it."

"His reputation?" Hermione asked as Draco rose slowly and 'accidentally' stood on Michael's fingers.

"Likes to get handsy with the ladies and doesn't like to be told *no*," Draco explained. "He's been reprimanded several times over it, and this might just be the last... if you choose to let Potter know."

"Interesting," Hermione mused. "I have a witness, plus I'm more than willing to give my memory of what happened to the Aurors. What do you say, Michael? Will you leave quietly, or would you prefer I tell a room full of Aurors what you just did?"

Michael looked up at her, then to Draco and back again, his eyes dazed. "But... you're a... you should submit."

Hermione rolled her eyes. "Like I said, I am *not* an Omega. I am an Alpha. I *will not* submit to anyone." She flicked her wrist and a cascade of white light filled the air, swirling and twisting to form a playful otter. "Gawain Robards, your assistance is required in the hallway outside the toilets."

The otter bounded off in the direction of the reception, eager to deliver Hermione's message to the head of the Auror Office. If Draco was correct, Harry's boss would be only too pleased to assist her.

"No, wait!" Michael scrambled to his feet, but Hermione held her hand out.

"Petrificus totalus."

The spell froze Michael on the spot — his eyes went wide and he slowly tilted backwards, his body hitting the floor with a heavy thud.

"Fucker," Draco snarled and then turned to Hermione. "Are you okay? Did he hurt you?"

She kicked Michael's foot with the toe of her shoe. "He's no different than all the other men who think I'll fall to my knees in submission. I'm not sure what part of *Alpha* they don't understand."

Draco touched her shoulder. "Hermione, did he hurt you?"

His face was full of concern, but also tinged with anger, and Hermione's insides did a flip; she could sense his need to beat Michael senseless. His caveman instincts should have incensed her, but she couldn't help but find his protectiveness endearing.

She circled his wrist with her fingers, lightly brushing the pad of her thumb over the sensitive gland. "I'm fine, Draco. He barely touched me."

"*Barely* touched you?" Draco hissed. "He shouldn't have even *breathed* near you."

"It's okay," she soothed, moving his hand from her shoulder to touch the gland at her throat. "He wouldn't have stood a chance against me anyway."

The tension in his face eased as his fingers caressed her skin, while her thumb continued to draw circles on his wrist. He stared down at her, his eyes lightening with each passing second. Grey to blue to sapphire to the clearest aquamarine she'd ever seen.

The air seemed to crackle around them, a magical energy emanating from them both and mingling. Hermione stepped closer to him and his free hand came up to cup her jaw.

"No one should be touching you," he whispered, bending to bring his mouth close to her ear. "Only one who is truly worthy..."

Their trance was broken by the clearing of a throat.

"Ah, sorry to disturb, but I believe I was called to assist."

Draco glanced over his shoulder to see Gawain Robards, and a smirking Blaise Zabini, eyeing the scene in front of them.

Draco dropped his hand reluctantly and stood by her side. The masculine aroma rolled off him in waves, the anger and concern, the Alpha instinct to protect her, the possessiveness. It was a heady mix of scents that was drawing heat to her very core, and she was sure her own eyes had turned to gold.

"Mr Corner was harassing Ms Granger. He took... liberties in touching her after she asked him not to."

"You did this to him, Ms Granger?" Gawain asked and Hermione nodded nervously as he peered around Draco's hulking frame. His mouth twitched and he huffed a laugh. "Looks like he finally got what he deserved."

"I'm happy to give you my memory of what happened," Hermione told him. "I want this to be done properly... but I don't have my wand and it's impossible to retrieve a memory without it."

Draco immediately took his wand from the hidden side pocket on his trousers and handed it to her. "You can use mine."

"I doubt it will let me," she replied, but at his insistence took it anyway. The wand tingled in her hand, much like her own did the first time she held it.

"Granger?"

"The wand chooses the wizard," she murmured and looked up at Draco. "How is it recognising me?"

"Maybe it just likes you."

"Maybe it's the Alpha it recognises."

"Maybe," Draco brushed his thumb over her temple. "Use it to retrieve that memory."

Hermione held the wand to her head and closed her eyes. She took a deep breath and allowed the wand to extract the memory from her mind.

Gawain took a small vial from inside his jacket pocket. "Always prepared," he explained and held it towards her, allowing her to slide the memory fog inside.

"Hermione?" Harry had obviously been told something had happened, and upon seeing Michael on the ground, he clearly knew what. His fist was balled and his jaw was set. "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine, Harry," Hermione touched his arm. "Go back to your wedding. We'll sort this out."

Harry was still glaring at Michael, his expression identical to Draco's — they both looked as though they wanted to kill him.

"Harry, please," Hermione ducked her head to catch his attention. "Don't ruin your day over him."

He shook his head. "He wasn't even invited. He must have snuck in somehow."

"Used his Auror badge," Gawain said and nodded to Hermione. "I hope it will be the last time he does."

"What the fuck happened?" Ginny was taking in the scene around her, Hannah and Neville close behind her.

"Looks like Corner finally met his match," Ron said as he followed Neville into the hallway.

Draco's head snapped in his direction, and he gripped Hermione's hip, pulling her behind him.

"Draco, what—?"

A growl rumbled in his chest and all the men in the hallway stepped back. Ginny and Hannah looked as confused as Hermione, but Ron's face had gone deathly pale.

Draco was almost snarling at him, his jaw clenched, his fists balled, his breath harsh. Hermione was startled as she stepped around him. The clear aquamarine in his eyes had turned pitch black.

She glanced at Ron, his eyes were wide and fearful. Neville stepped up beside him, and Hannah and Ginny, realising what was happening, both stepped in front of him.

"Draco," Hermione said calmly. "Ignore him and look at me."

Draco didn't budge, his eyes locked on Ron, still glaring at him.

She touched his jaw, but he still didn't look at her.

"Draco." His name was a whisper as her fingers brushed softly down his neck to slip beneath his collar, touching the gland at the base of his throat.

His focus snapped back to her, his face relaxing, eyes clearing.

"What can you scent?" Hermione asked quietly, her fingers circling and calming him.

"You," Draco tensed slightly, his eyes flicking to Ron and then back to her. "He smells of you."

"But he's married to Daphne," Hermione's voice remained calm. "We've not been together for years."

"It's still there. Underneath everything else, you're still there."

"But I'm not. Ron is my friend, that's all." She placed her free hand on his chest. "And he's not interested in being anything more than my friend."

"Then why...?"

"It's probably the same as it is with me." She smiled up at him, his eyes were grey again, his breathing had calmed, his body relaxing. "He smells like death to me because the Alpha side of me sees him as a reject. But maybe because I was with him for a short time, the Alpha side of you sees him as a threat."

Draco glanced back at Ron, his lip curling and another growl rumbled in his chest.

"Draco, stop!" Hermione's tone had changed. "Stop being a ridiculous caveman. Ron is my friend and he always will be. And the truth of it is, you're nothing to me, and the way you're acting, you never will be."

Draco's eyes flashed, his calm demeanour fading, but Hermione simply arched her eyebrow, daring him to challenge her.

They stood staring at each other. The air crackled again, but this was not the magical trance of minutes ago — this was strength and dominance.

And neither wanted to relent.

"Ah, right then," Gawain said awkwardly, then dropped to one knee beside Michael. "Auror Zabini, if you would assist me."

Blaise nodded and helped to stand Michael's petrified body upright. The two men linked their arms behind him.

"Mr Corner will be cooling off in the holding cells. We'll be back soon, I don't want to miss this party." Blaise grinned at Draco and Hermione, just before he and Gawain disappeared with Michael.

"Hermione?" Hannah said. "Did you want to come back inside?"

Hermione's gaze hadn't left Draco, the pair still staring at each other in a silent fight for dominance.

"No, I think Mr Malfoy and I might need to talk."

Ginny moved slowly towards them, gently touching Hermione's shoulder. "Hermione, maybe another time. This is Harry's wedding, you don't want to get pissed at Malfoy and ruin your night."

Hermione blinked as Ginny repeated her own words to Harry. There would be a time and place for this conversation, and Ginny was right, Harry's wedding wasn't it.

She stepped away from him. "You're right, our friends have just gotten married and we should be celebrating. It was rude of me to make a scene. Mr Malfoy, we'll talk later."

"Fucking asshole!" Pansy's hand balled into a fist and she looked fit to explode. "Why did he think that was okay?"

"Hermione took care of him," Ginny explained. "And it's probably the last time he'll cross her, or any other woman."

"Who turns up to a wedding when they're not invited?" Pansy was seething.

They'd all returned to the reception, Harry and Ron first, which had turned out to be a wise move. Pansy was furious. Her wedding had been crashed and that was bad enough, but that it had been done so by someone whose sole purpose was to seek out her friend, made it worse.

"Pansy, sweetheart," Harry kissed his wife's temple. "After the number Hermione did on him, he'll wake up sore tomorrow."

Pansy looked at Hermione for confirmation.

"I *Flipendo'd* him into the wall," Hermione shrugged and winced. "And then petrified him when he tried to get up."

"And I missed it?!" Pansy tilted her head to the side. "I always miss the crazy side of you."

"I shouldn't have done it," Hermione fidgeted with the diamond pendant at her throat. "I should have just Disapparated back here."

"Fuck that!" Pansy exclaimed. "He got what he deserved. He shouldn't have been here and he definitely shouldn't have touched you."

"That's what I told her."

Draco had kept his distance, sticking to the opposite side of the room when they'd returned. Hermione's anger had flared when a blonde pair of boobs approached him, but Hermione had calmed immediately when Draco — in no uncertain terms — rebuffed those advances and the tramp scurried away.

"Yeah, but you were an arse about it," Ginny said.

"Oh, and you saw the whole thing, Ms Weasley?" Draco countered, arching one eyebrow.

"I... *ah*... well, no," Ginny stammered, the glare of an annoyed Alpha male rendering her near speechless.

"No, you weren't. And while I might have been an arse when you lot arrived, Ms Granger was more than capable of taking care of herself." Draco glanced around at them all. "I was merely a witness to the event."

He turned to Hermione and held out his hand.

"Ms Granger, would you do me the honour of joining me on the dance floor?"

Hermione hesitated. The attention they would attract wasn't something she wanted. Nor did she want to have the room watching her and not Pansy.

She glanced at Pansy, who held up her palms and shrugged. "It's fine with me."

"But everyone will be watching us."

Draco simply smiled. "It's just a dance, Ms Granger. That's all."

She took his offered hand. "Just a dance."

He led her across the room, weaving amongst the other guests to place them in the centre of the dance floor.

"So, you *want* to be noticed then?" Hermione smiled wryly at him as his hand slipped around her hip to rest low on her back.

"Unfortunately, because of who we both are, it's unavoidable, so we might as well take centre stage." He pulled her close and she frowned.

"Draco..."

"We're dancing, Granger." He moved them easily across the floor. "We're not fucking."

"Excuse me?" Hermione almost choked at his brashness, glancing around to see who might have heard.

"It's the truth."

"Yes, but you don't have to announce it to the entire room."

Draco laughed. "I said we're *not* fucking."

"I'll walk away and leave you here."

"Go ahead," he told her. "But I don't think you will."

She looked up at him, her eyes challenging him. "And why wouldn't I?"

"You've already made two scenes today, I doubt you want to go for a third."

"Two?"

"You tried to avoid everyone seeing you at the ceremony." His hand on her back shifted, his warm fingers touching her bare skin. "And the incident in the hallway wasn't your fault, but the entire room already knows what happened."

"How...?" She looked around once more. Everyone was obvious in their attempts to avoid watching them.

"You're new to this. You might not believe it, but in the beginning, I tried to do the same — avoid people. But, as I said, it is *unavoidable*." He spun her around, and pulled her back against him, whispering close to her ear. "No one could have missed seeing you anyway. You're the brightest light in the room."

Hermione's instincts screamed at her to run her tongue along his neck, to give into him, to end this ridiculous game of dominance. But she shoved the feeling away. One compliment wasn't going to make her drop to her knees.

"Not Pansy?"

"No." The aquamarine had returned to his irises and she had to look away. "She's merely the bride. Nothing special."

Hermione huffed out a laugh. "She'll kill you."

"She knows how I feel."

Hermione looked back up at him. His eyes searched hers — clearly her eyes had changed as well.

"You're okay, though?" he asked softly, and she nodded. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to get so..."

"Protective?"

"Yeah. I know you can take care of yourself, but I wanted to physically throw him through the wall."

"I'm fine, Draco. But what about you? What was that thing with Ron? You looked ready to rip his head off."

Draco peered over her shoulder, and his hand tightened on her back when he spotted Ron. "I didn't like scenting you on him."

Hermione frowned. "But surely you've seen him before today."

"A few times, but I've never felt like that."

"So why now?"

Draco shrugged. "I don't know."

"I think you do. You're just afraid to admit it."

"And what is it that you think I know?"

"You know that he's my friend. You know we were together for less than two months. You *know* I'm not interested in him."

Draco scowled. "You're going to make me say it, aren't you?"

"Say what?" Hermione smiled sweetly at him.

"That I've chosen you," His eyes glowed and the lightest blue she'd ever seen swirled before her. "And I believe you've chosen me, as well."

"Why would you think that?"

"You said Weasley smells like death, and I can't imagine that's pleasant." Draco's eyes darted to Ron once more, and Hermione saw the muscle in his cheek twitch.

"No, it's *not* pleasant. I can't be near him."

Draco gave her a devilish grin. "Then why weren't you disgusted with him just now? He was standing right by you."

"No he wasn't..." Hermione's brow furrowed; Draco was right. Ron had been standing just metres away from her in the hallway and even closer as they explained what had happened to Pansy. And she couldn't remember scenting him in either place. "How is that possible?"

"I don't know. This is all new to me, as well." Draco locked his eyes on hers. "All I know is I didn't want him near you."

"You see him as a threat?"

Draco snorted. "Hardly."

Hermione shook her head. "I don't understand this. Your mother said this might happen when we bonded. I wasn't expecting it before that happened."

"*When* we bond? So it *is* going to happen?"

She blinked away, unable to stop her smile. "You know it is," she said quietly.

"So—"

"I'm not ready, Draco, and..." She swallowed thickly, and exhaled a slow, shaky breath before looking up at him. "We barely know each other."

"Then let's stop this pissing contest we've started and get to know each other." He brought his hand up to cup her jaw. "And there'll be no pressure from me. I might be an Alpha, and despite my performance to date, I'm not a complete asshole. I want to know you, Granger, I want to know everything. I want... I want you."

Hermione stared into his eyes, saw the sincerity, and instantly she knew this was no longer a game. But she couldn't resist teasing him.

"And you always get what you want, right?"

"I blame my parents. They never said *no* to me," he chuckled and then slowly dipped his head towards her.

Hermione straightened, putting some distance between them. "Don't you even think about kissing me, Draco Malfoy. Not in front of everyone. We've taken enough attention away from the bride and groom."

"Of course, Ms Granger," Draco nodded politely. "Might I enquire as to when would it be appropriate to kiss you?"

"Well, *Mr Darcy*," she rolled her eyes at his smug expression. Pansy and Harry had obviously told him a few things that might win her favour, and Austen's Fitzwilliam Darcy was high on her list. "A gentleman would offer to escort me home. And before seeing me safely inside my door, he might offer a chaste kiss on my cheek."

"Chaste... hmm," he murmured, taking a step back. Her arms fell to her sides and she stared up at him. "If you would be so kind, Ms Granger, to inform me when you are ready to leave, it will be my honour to escort you home safely."

Draco lifted her hand to his lips, kissing it chastely. He winked at her, causing her stomach to flip. "That's the only chaste kiss you'll receive tonight."

The wedding finally rolled to a close, Harry and Pansy departing beneath a display of magical fireworks. The remaining guests had mingled briefly before Disapparating in ones and twos.

Hermione had noted the way Draco hesitated before discreetly making his way over to her. He gave her a short nod, and she didn't miss the heat in his eyes as he indicated subtly towards the door, causing a tiny shiver to slide down her spine.

How did he do that? How — with just a simple look — did he make her feel exposed, naked, and wanting more than the chaste kiss she'd asked for?

Waiting the longest minute of her life, Hermione finally bid her friends goodnight and wandered in the direction Draco had indicated. She walked along the path towards the road and laughingly shook her head when she spotted him leaning against a tree.

"Ms Granger." He stepped onto the path beside her and held out his arm. "I believe you requested that I escort you home."

"Mr Malfoy, I believe I did." She curled her hand around his elbow and then bit back her laugh. "Do you even know where I live?"

"Absolutely no clue." Draco grinned down at her. "I might request your assistance with that."

"Pretty poor excuse for a gentleman."

"If I knew where you lived, I'm pretty sure that'd be called stalking."

Hermione laughed again. "Touché. Are you ready?"

"Lead the way, Ms Granger."

The pull of Apparition lasted just seconds, and when they reappeared on her front stoop, Draco's wolfish grin returned. He stepped towards her and she took a corresponding step back.

"Thank you for everything, Draco." Hermione retreated until her back was flush against the door. "Really, it was very... helpful of you."

"Helpful?" His fingers went to her throat, tracing down the delicate curve of her neck to brush across the sensitive skin at the juncture of her collarbone. "You didn't need help, Granger. I was merely a witness."

He dipped his head to her other shoulder, pressing gentle kisses along her smooth skin. Her entire body shuddered as his tongue flicked across the gland, while his fingers continued to tease its twin.

"You are an Alpha, Hermione Granger. You don't need rescuing." His mouth moved to her neck, his lips sliding slowly upwards. "You are intelligent." His teeth grazed her earlobe. "You are strong." His lips found her jaw. "You are the most talented witch I have ever known."

He paused, both his hands coming up to cup her face.

"And you are more beautiful than any woman I have ever met."

Hermione's heart was hammering, her breath short. His scent surrounded her and the nearness of him left her feeling dizzy with the realisation that he was going to kiss her. Really kiss her. Not an angry, frustrated kiss like they'd shared in her office.

He bent slowly to meet her, his lips parting, his breath shaky. He was as nervous as she was — a fact she found endearing.

His mouth slid over hers, and relief spread through her; a warm feeling of this — of him — being right. But he was also being careful, moving slowly, giving her every chance to stop him if she needed to.

But it was the last thing she wanted.

His lips were perfect, exactly how she remembered. Hard and soft, commanding, and he was kissing her in a way that made her feel like she was completely melting inside. Her world became the tiny space that they now occupied.

Just him.

Just her.

And a sense of belonging *to* him, of ownership *of* him.

Her hands slipped beneath his jacket, her arms wrapping tightly around him, and she pressed herself into the solid wall of his chest, sighing at the groan of relief that sounded from him and vibrated against her mouth.

The Alpha inside her calmed, the need to dominate disappearing. He needed to lead this, to control this kiss, and Narcissa's words suddenly made sense.

The mate you choose will understand you, and you will understand him. You will work in perfect unison and the bond will be unbreakable.

A heavy ache began to build between her legs, and Draco growled against her mouth. He pulled away, only to dip back down to lay his tongue across both glands at her throat.

"I have to leave," he stated, his voice strained. "You're not ready and... *fuck!*"

He quickly brushed his lips over hers, once, twice, and then pulled away again. He stepped back, and she could see the tension in his body. He was as aroused as she was, but she couldn't. Not yet.

"Go inside, Granger." His voice was thick, straining for control. "Please."

Hermione nodded, and quickly unlocked the door, stepping inside and turning to face him.

"Good night, Draco."

He nodded, his jaw tight, his eyes crystal blue. "Good night."

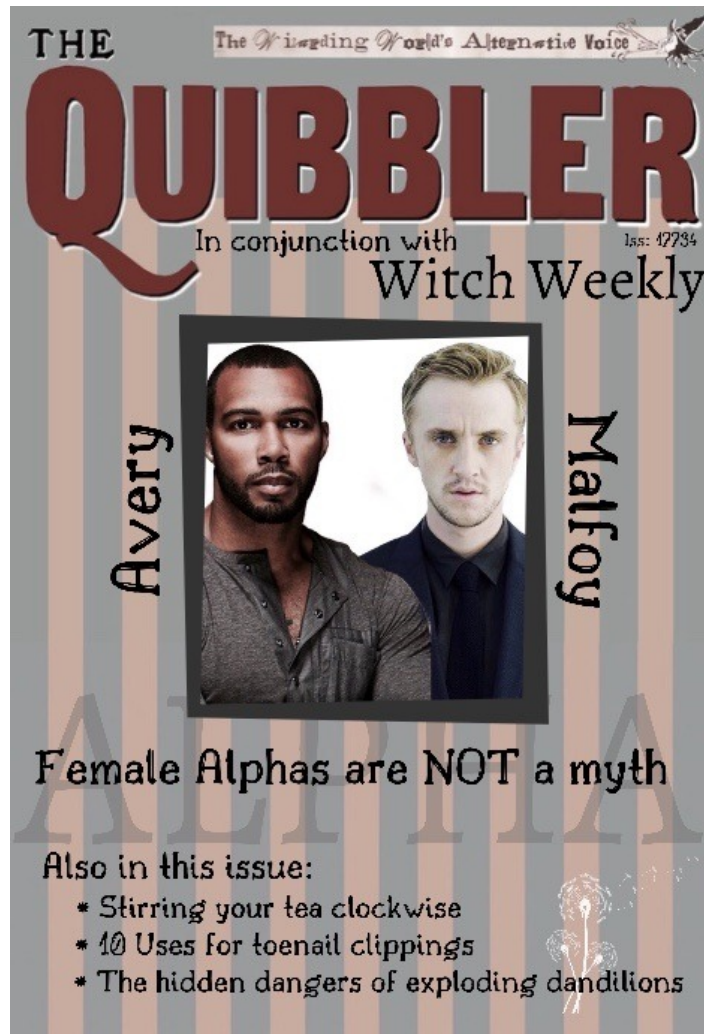
And then he was gone.

She let out a shaky exhale and closed the door, leaning back against it. She touched her swollen lips — she could still taste him, feel him, and she closed her eyes.

"Hermione Granger. You are so completely fucked."

Chapter 14





Hermione stared at the headline on the front page of The Daily Prophet. The bold letters shouted her name once more, but this time the picture accompanying them was not of her, but of Draco, smiling nervously at her.

And she was seething.

She'd not read any further than the headline, assuming that someone at the wedding had leaked the incident with Michael Corner or that she and Draco had danced together. Or both.

And the thought of either being reported did not please her.

Why she wasn't given the same courtesy as her male counterparts baffled her. Yes, she was an anomaly — rarest of the rare — but that didn't mean her personal life was public property.

She was openly talked about, pointed at, ogled by men who thought it was their right to claim her, scowled at by women who thought she would steal their husbands and boyfriends.

Alexander and Draco weren't subjected to such scrutiny. In fact, they were lauded as near heroes, men to be worshipped and admired simply because of their status in society. But *their* lives weren't constantly commented on.

Well, Draco *had* enjoyed the attention, but the instant he decided to step out of the limelight, that decision was respected. No stories or pictures had been printed of him in months.

But now her name was a headline again, and going by the nervous expression on his face, it was all thanks, once more, to Draco.

She thought their interaction at the wedding had meant something. His restraint when it came to Michael had been admirable — especially when she knew he wanted to tear him in two. His imitation of Mr Darcy — or his attempt at least — had made her laugh.

And their kiss.

Her face warmed at just the thought of it.

Even in her limited experience, she knew there was passion behind it, not just Draco wanting to fuck another Alpha simply to say he had.

But this headline...

"It's not as bad as you think," Hannah stepped out of the floo and crossed to her immediately. "Really, he's not fucked you over this time."

"What *has* he said this time?" Hermione still hadn't looked up; her focus was solely on the picture of Draco. He was smiling cautiously at her, but his eyes carried a knowing spark.

"He said nothing to The Prophet. And the picture of him is an old one. It has nothing to do with the story they've made up. They've simply tried to upstage these," Hannah placed copies of *Witch Weekly* and *The Quibbler* on the counter. Both covers featured Draco, but also Alexander Avery.

Hermione frowned at the magazine covers. "But these are both dated tomorrow."

Hannah nodded. "Pansy and Luna were kind enough to send advanced copies. You probably didn't get yours yet because you were here before the sun was up. So, before you start ranting at Draco, you need to read one of these."

"What they think of female Alphas? Really?"

"I think you should read it for yourself," Hannah tapped Draco's picture with her finger. "Maybe I misjudged him."

Hermione finally glanced up to find Hannah smiling. "You've misjudged him?"

"Yeah, I think I have. We all have," She tapped the paper again. "Go to your office, read it, and you'll see what I mean."

Hermione was sceptical, but Hannah had been the loudest in condemning Draco, so for her to admit she might have been wrong about him was a huge deal.

She picked up the magazines and made her way to her office. With a long sigh, she sat at her desk and looked at the glossy publications. *Witch Weekly* had Alexander and Draco on the cover, and three lines: *Avery and Malfoy. What they really think about female Alphas. Their exclusive interview with Pansy Parkinson.*

Pansy. At least she was trustworthy — unlike Theo Nott. She'd been privy to their lives for so long now, but had never once made a story out of them. She'd even told her bosses her wedding was off limits.

And *The Quibbler*. Hermione could only imagine what Luna's theories on female Alphas were.

She set *The Quibbler* aside and focused on *Witch Weekly*. Avery and Malfoy. Alphas. Males. What would their opinions be?

Hermione hesitated before flicking the pages and finding the interview. She leaned back in her chair, took a steadying breath, and began to read.

>>> **HG/DM** <<<

ALPHA

by Pansy Parkinson

"And some things that should not have been forgotten were lost. History became legend, legend became myth."

JRR Tolkien, The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring

The female Alpha. Long forgotten. Pushed into history and out of mind. And until now, only three have ever existed.

Emaline Rosier.

Claire Burke.

Rowan Black.

They lived in times where women were still looked upon — even in the more progressive magical world — as the lesser sex, weaker, more fragile. Women were nurturers, mothers, homemakers. Women were expected to obey.

Of course, male Alphas have existed throughout history. An accepted part of the magical world, *Alpha* is a well-known affliction, albeit rare, even in males. To be an Alpha male means dominance, strength — it means a life to be envied. It means he is a man amongst men.

But these three women broke the mould and became the rarest of the rare. They chose their own path, chose their own mate. And to choose was not an option for females of their times. But Emaline, Claire, and Rowan, female Alphas, became names that were looked upon with the awe and respect that had previously only been shown to men.

That respect, it seems, has now become a part of the female Alpha myth.

Alexander Avery and Draco Malfoy, the two most recently presented Alpha males, have only ever been talked about in hushed tones behind closed doors. They can move amongst society and are given nothing more than a sideways glance. Their privacy is respected, and their lives are not up for public discussion.

However, it would appear the same courtesy, the same respect, has not been extended to the recently revealed fourth female Alpha, Hermione Granger. Her privacy has been torn from her and her life has become a circus.

And this leads to some questions. What is Alpha? What *does* Alpha mean? Why *do* we think of Alpha as above all? And why does being a female Alpha change the unwritten rules?

In a rare interview, Alexander Avery and Draco Malfoy sat down with me to answer those questions and more. Here's an edited transcript of that open and frank conversation.

In the years since your coming of age, how has life changed?

Avery: Since it was inevitable, for me it was a minor inconvenience. One of the things that is widely known is that the first few months of an Alpha's changing is an up and down ride of hormones and growth spurts, and if we're being completely honest, an insatiable desire for the opposite sex. But, as I said, it was inevitable and I had already met the woman who would become my wife a year and a half before my change. I was kept away from her for several months, but as the changes settled, my life resumed normality.

Malfoy: It is well known what path my life took. Initially I avoided everyone — the war had just ended and my family's name wasn't one that brought smiles to faces. So I hid for a while to deal with the aftermath, and then, of course I had to deal with the Alpha side of me presenting. But, unlike Alexander, settled wasn't something I strove for. Once I'd become accustomed to being an Alpha, I unabashedly loved the limelight, loved the attention, flaunted who I was — who I am. And with the testing done at birth, and the fact I was aware of what would happen, I jumped into my status like it was a great victory.

In the testing that is carried out at birth in the Wizarding World, in both your years, no Omegas were discovered. Was that something that disappointed you?

Avery: Absolutely not. In our teachings, when we're prepared for what to expect when the change comes, we're taught that Omegas are as rare as Alphas. Probably more so.

Malfoy: I can't answer for Alexander, but because there were no Omegas born, very little was taught to me.

Avery: I experienced the same. There was no point in rueing something that didn't exist. And had an Omega been born in our generation, with only two male Alphas, it would have most likely been her choice.

Her choice? So, Omegas *aren't* subservient?

Malfoy: Contrary to the popular beliefs, no, they aren't. Not completely in any case. An Omega will definitely come under the spell — if you will — of an Alpha, but when the numbers of Alphas are limited, it will inevitably fall to the Omega to choose who she is most strongly attracted to.

Avery: And honestly, it's only during an Omega's heat cycle that she's the most vulnerable. All other times, she's no different from you.

Interesting. That's completely different than the assumed knowledge.

Malfoy: And that's the problem with assumptions. Most times, they're wrong. The only exception is that when an Omega is marked by an Alpha, all others know to stay away.

Avery: And in most of the books about Alphas and Omegas, the authors have simply used the assumed information. The basic facts are correct, the heats Omegas have to endure, the cycles of those heats, and how male Alphas react to an Omega's pheromones. But as I said, most times an Omega is no different than any other female on the planet.

What about now? A new player has entered the game, as it were. A female Alpha. The first of her kind in over two hundred years. How does she shift the dynamics of what you learned?

Avery: Ms Granger's Alpha status is certainly unique, but as for the dynamics? Well, I don't see her as anything less than a male Alpha.

Malfoy: I will admit that at first I was completely shocked. In fact, I was rather rude about it. Ms Granger and I have been... competing since we were eleven years old, and I'm not embarrassed to admit my ego was bruised when I discovered I would be competing with her once more. But as for the dynamics, her status changes nothing. She should be held in the same regard as any Alpha.

With a female Alpha now existing, what does that mean for the traditional thinking regarding Alphas?

Malfoy: That it's considered a male only club, you mean?

For the past two hundred years, Alpha was the sole domain of men and female Alphas had long been forgotten. So yes, the traditions associated with it being a male dominated status.

Malfoy: With the rarity of female Alphas, I guess it did become the norm to assume that it was only males who were Alphas. And unfortunately, because of those two hundred years, men have assumed the role belongs only to them.

Avery: I don't think any of us here had ever heard of a female Alpha. I know I certainly hadn't.

Malfoy: I knew of the possibility. Rowan Black is an ancestor on my mother's side. But, like everyone else, we assumed — wrongly — that the female Alpha line had disappeared.

And what of Ms Granger? She is the exact opposite of what we have come to know of Alphas — pureblood, a high standing in society, a previous Alpha ancestor.

Avery: From what I know of Ms Granger, I don't think her status should come as a surprise to anyone. She's incredibly talented, she's highly intelligent, and her achievements at her age are a testament to her hard work and determination.

Malfoy: And her blood status doesn't matter. Nor does her perceived position in society. And if we've learned anything due to events in recent years, none of that matters anyway. What does matter is that she's all the things Alexander mentioned and more.

But what of her status being leaked to the press?

Malfoy: That was unintentionally my fault. And as much as I would love to elaborate, unfortunately it's impossible. My solicitors are currently looking into the situation, and we're hoping for a positive outcome for Ms Granger.

Avery: And her status shouldn't have been reported on in any case. Mine and Draco's lives are never made public, unless we choose for them to be. She should have been afforded the same respect.

And that was my next question. What about the lack of respect shown to her?

Malfoy: It's interesting, isn't it? From the first records of male Alphas, there has been a quiet respect given. And that unwritten rule has been upheld. No one has truly spoken openly about us, and the utmost respect for our privacy has been given. And as far as I can tell, the three previous female Alphas were treated in the same manner. And yet, Ms Granger has been afforded none of it. Her life has become a kind of free-for-all and everyone seems to think it's perfectly okay to harass her.

Avery: It's disgusting actually. Why anyone would think it was okay to publicise her status without her permission astounds me. And as you yourself said, Ms Parkinson, men especially seem to think she's public property. She's not an Omega in heat — she's an Alpha. Those men are fortunate she has a good heart, or they'd probably be spending some time at St Mungo's having their heads removed from their arses.

Hermione Granger is a close friend and believe me, Mr Avery, your observation is closer to the truth than you realise. So, why do you think she's being treated differently from you? Should it matter that she's a female Alpha instead of a male one?

Avery: It shouldn't. In my opinion, the reporters at The Daily Prophet should be ashamed of themselves. Female Alpha or male Alpha, it makes no difference. And in all honesty, everyone's privacy should be respected, Alpha or not.

Malfoy: Alexander's right. The unwritten rules about Alpha and Omega privacy have been completely disregarded with Ms Granger. It's as if her war heroine status has allowed for a free reign on her Alpha status. And it's rubbish. Applaud her valour in the war, it's well-deserved. Talk freely and openly about it. But leave her be when it comes to her being an Alpha.

What about this interview? Doesn't it contradict your call for her privacy?

Malfoy: I'm sure many people will see it that way, but I don't think it does. We're both Alphas. We both understand what that means. And it's a simple case of wanting everyone to know this behaviour is unacceptable.

Avery: I will admit, when Draco asked me if I would be willing to participate, I was hesitant. I've maintained a very private lifestyle and wish to keep it that way. But the way Ms Granger has been treated compelled me to speak to you.

Malfoy: And while our lives aren't spoken or written about, we're still a curiosity.

Avery: Draco's right. The polite distance people keep, the stares, the pointing — it all still happens, but it's done more discreetly with us. I understand the interest in us, but again, we're really no different from anyone else.

You say that, but it's definitely not true. There are huge distinctions between you both and the rest of us.

Malfoy: With the Alpha side, yes, you're right. We have heightened senses, smell and hearing especially. We're probably much more aware of the world around us, the people.

Avery: And I think that's all everyone focuses on. Alexander Avery, Alpha. Draco Malfoy, Alpha. It follows us everywhere.

Malfoy: Yeah, and it's *not* everything. It's just a small part of who we are. Alexander is a successful Arithmancer. I have my own Potions and Herbology company. *That's* who we are. Alpha doesn't define that side of us. We've had to work hard to achieve our successes.

Avery: And it's why Ms Granger needs to be left alone. She has her own business to run and doesn't need the constant intrusions from the media and the public.

Malfoy: And Ms Granger herself proves our point. Until a few months ago, she was simply Hermione Granger, war heroine and successful businesswoman. Now everyone seems to think she's changed. She hasn't. She's still the same person she was before. She looks the

same, she acts the same, she works just as hard as she did before her status changed. Alpha is just a small part of our lives.

So, the two of you are here to, what? Save her, be Alphas and stand over her, not allow her to defend herself?

Malfoy: Ms Parkinson, you and I both know that Ms Granger does not need saving. She's more than capable of taking care of herself.

Avery: No, we're definitely *not* trying to stand over her. I think even without her Alpha status, Ms Granger would show us both up. We simply wanted the magical world to understand that she's equal to us, and in that sense, she should be shown the same respect we are.

Malfoy: Exactly. The invasion into her life has been completely disrespectful and — given everything she's done for the magical community — the absolute height of poor manners. The people who thought they could gain an advantage by revealing her status should probably be aware that, in my personal experience, it's not advisable to piss her off. She doesn't need magic, she has a mean right hook.

So, there it is. The two male Alphas who simply see Ms Granger as their equal. They're not threatened by her, nor do they think she's fair game. Ms Granger is a close personal friend, and I'm sure there will be some who see this story as biased. But she does not need any bias towards her. Hermione Granger is a force of her own making. She has worked hard, is intelligent, has seen the worst of people — has experienced it first hand.

Those who are constantly pursuing her would do well to remember Ms Granger is an Alpha, not an Omega.

And like Mr Malfoy said, it's not advisable to be on her wrong side.

>>> HG/DM <<<

"I hope you're not about to *Avada* me."

Hermione's head snapped up; Draco was standing in the doorway, a nervous smile on his face.

She was stunned. She hadn't been sure what to expect, but an interview with both him and Alexander Avery wasn't even a consideration.

"I'm not sure what to think," She glanced back down at the magazine. "When did you do this?"

Draco stepped into the room, closing the door behind him. "A week ago. We had hoped that we could get it out sooner, but unfortunately we weren't able to. And it's upsetting that we

couldn't; it might have stopped Corner from approaching you at the wedding."

"Draco, this is..." She shook her head, looking back up at him. "How did you... I mean Alexander...?"

"We talked at length. Like he said, he was very hesitant, but he realised he needed to speak up when Pansy and I explained how you've been treated."

"But you both revealed so much private stuff," Hermione picked up *The Quibbler*. "And I haven't even read this one yet."

"It's pretty much the same," Draco informed her. "Luna was kind enough to run the story as well. We wanted it to get to as many people as possible."

"I'm not sure how many men read Witch Weekly," Hermione said. "And I adore Luna, but *The Quibbler* isn't the most widely read magazine."

"And that's why I've ensured every Wizarding household in Britain will receive a copy of each."

Hermione's jaw dropped open. "Draco, I don't know what to say. This is... this is too much."

Draco circled around her desk to squat beside her chair. He lifted her hand and pressed a kiss to her palm. "No, it's not nearly enough. You have been treated deplorably by almost everyone, and I include myself in that. But when these are distributed tomorrow, I'm hoping the entire population will be ashamed of themselves."

"I'm not sure shaming everyone will be any better. It'll probably just make them even more pissy than they already are."

Draco released her hand and stood, his spine straightening and Hermione scented his anger building.

"Have there been men in here already this morning?" He glanced at the door, looking like he was about to go on a rampage through the shop.

"No, not yet. But I'm sure they'll be here." She sighed and reached for his hand. "And it's not just men. I've had to deal with women staring daggers at me as well."

"What?" He looked confused. "Women? But why?"

She shrugged one shoulder. "I guess they think I'll steal their boyfriends or husbands. I have enough to deal with without having to worry about all that bitchy female bullshit."

"That's ridiculous," Draco shook his head in disbelief. "I wish I would have known. I would have mentioned it."

"It's fine. You said enough."

"I really didn't. I can't believe this. You've been dealing with more than I realised."

"Draco, you and Alexander have done more than enough. I think once everyone has read these, the harassment will stop." Hermione stood and lifted his hand, kissing the inside of his wrist. "I mean, I have two big Alpha males watching out for me, I think that's deterrent enough."

"But we shouldn't have to. In fact, we don't *need* to," Draco touched his fingers to the base of her throat. "Everyone knows you can take care of yourself. I honestly don't understand why Corner thought it wise to approach you."

Hermione's hands went to his hips and she smiled. "I'm sure he's regretting it now. Harry assured me before he and Pansy left for Alaska that Mr Corner is trying his hardest to show remorse. But with my memory and your testimony, he'll be thrown out of the Auror's Department in days."

"I can't believe they went to Alaska for their honeymoon," Draco's hands slid over her shoulders, his fingertips tracing patterns on her arms.

Hermione laughed. "Cold weather means staying indoors, all cozy by the fire, watching the snow falling outside. It's all very romantic."

"Hmm," Draco hummed, leaning down to touch his lips to her throat. "Is that what you like, Granger? Romance?"

"I prefer the cold weather, actually," she said nonchalantly.

Draco laughed against her shoulder before lifting his head to look at her. "Noted. I'll be sure to only take you to freezing places."

"And who said I'd accompany you?"

"I think we both know you will."

"But you've not asked," She slid her hands around his back, pressing herself closer to him.

"Well, I *was* going to ask you to lunch, but it seems you're not interested."

Hermione laughed again. "It's ten in the morning. It's not even close to lunchtime."

"I was going to come back. Hannah said you usually head out around one," He leaned his forehead on hers. "Ms Granger, would you accompany me to lunch today?"

"Mr Malfoy, it would be my pleasure."

His mouth covered hers, and he groaned when her lips opened against his, allowing him in. This was nothing like the heated exchange of the previous Saturday night, nor was it like the frenzied kiss they'd shared the last time he was in her office. This kiss was soft, slow, his lips moving easily against hers.

"Hermione, there's— Shit! Sorry."

Draco laughed as Hermione jerked away from him, her cheeks flushing crimson.

"Hannah... ah... this is..."

"This is you and Draco not doing anything, right?" Hannah's shock had turned to amusement. "I don't care what you do in here, just lock the door and silence the room."

"We weren't going to do... *that*," Hermione hissed and the inkwell on her desk rattled.

Hannah was by her side in an instant, shoving Draco away and taking her hand. "I was just teasing. Sorry, you're already worked up and I should have known better. Big breaths, Hermione."

Hermione closed her eyes and breathed deeply. Hannah's hand squeezed hers and the surge of annoyance disappeared. She thought she was getting a grip on her emotions, and Hannah's teasing shouldn't have set her off. She knew her friends assumed she and Draco would end up together; her description of their first meeting at the Manor was a constant topic of conversation which never bothered her. But it seemed, of late, it was the small, innocuous comments that set her off.

"What's happening?" Draco was alarmed.

"She's still learning to control her emotions," Hannah explained. "Michael Corner is lucky he's not having his bones regrown in St Mungo's right now."

"But... you were only teasing," Draco held Hermione's other hand, his thumb drawing soothing circles over her skin.

"Joking has been setting me off lately." Hermione opened her eyes and smiled. "It's ridiculous."

"It's not ridiculous," Hannah told her. "You've been an Alpha for less than three months. Go easy on yourself. I'm sure Draco was intolerable at first."

"Oh, intolerable is an understatement. It's why I no longer live at the Manor." Draco cupped Hermione's cheek. "Are you okay?"

She nodded. "Hannah reads the signs and has become quite adept at calming me down."

The bell on the shop counter chimed and they all startled.

"Customers. *Fuck!*" Hannah cursed and headed for the door, glancing back over her shoulder and winking. "I'll want a full explanation later, young lady."

Draco ducked his head to look her directly in the eye. "Are you sure you're okay?"

"I am. It's just taking a bit of getting used to."

"I'll help wherever I can, remember that." He kissed her forehead. "I do have to go, but I'll be back to take you to lunch."

"Draco, I'm not sure if I can." She dropped her eyes from his. "You saw me just now, I can't deal with the public... not if I'm with you. The scrutiny will be unbearable."

"Do you trust me?" He tipped her chin up and she shrugged. "Please trust me, Granger. I promise I won't let anyone see us."

Hermione nodded and Draco kissed her forehead once more.

"I'll be back at one," He grinned. "That'll give you plenty of time to fill Hannah in."

"But... this is my garden."

"Well spotted, Granger," Draco laughed. "It was either here or at mine, but since I don't have a garden, your place won."

"But where..." Hermione turned around and spotted a table set beneath the large tree in the rear of the garden. Two chairs were sat on either side, and the table held what looked like a smorgasbord of food.

"What did you do?"

"You asked me to impress you, to prove this wasn't a game."

"No, I actually asked you to prove to me what a *true* Alpha male is."

He stepped closer, brushing his thumb over her hip, "And I'd be more than happy to prove what a true Alpha male is, but... you're not ready yet."

"Draco, I'm sorry." Her eyes flicked to her house. "I can't. Not—"

He pressed a finger to her lips. "That's not why I brought you here." He tucked her hair behind her ear and kissed her cheek. "So... lunch?"

He held his arm out, gesturing towards the table, and she smiled.

"Thank you," She sat at the table and looked over the food. "What is that?"

"Oh, I believe it's your favourite. Potato and leek, right?"

Her eyes grew to the size of dinner plates. "You went to..."

"To The Burrow? Yes, I did. And Molly was most accommodating. We had a lovely chat where she threatened parts of my anatomy if I dared to hurt you and then explained that she had five sons who would do the same."

"*Four* sons," Hermione corrected. "Percy would need forms stamped and notarised from the Ministry."

Draco burst out laughing. "That's probably true."

"No, *it is* true," She smirked. "He's worse than me."

"Pfft, you broke more rules than anyone I know." Draco tasted the soup and his eyes went wide. "Okay, I can see why you love this."

"Molly is wonderful." Hermione smiled and tilted her head thoughtfully. "Are we going to talk about what happened at the wedding?"

Draco shrugged. "I'm not big on outdoor ceremonies, but it was nice enough, I guess."

Hermione shot him an incredulous glare and he grinned.

"Oh, you mean the thing with Mr Corner? Or that we danced for twenty minutes?"

"Draco!" Hermione's eyes darkened and Draco reached for her hand.

"Shit, sorry. I wasn't thinking." He squeezed gently, watching her eyes as they returned to the colour of chestnut he was beginning to love.

"I hate this. It makes me feel so weak," She let out a frustrated breath. "When does it get better?"

"It gets easier. It takes time, but I promise you, it does." He traced his thumb over the back of her hand. "And you're not weak. You proved that with Corner. And you proved it with me. You didn't back down from either of us."

"Why can I manage the big things, but the little things make my blood boil?"

"The big things probably seem more controllable. Something you can touch or see... or throw a hex at." She rolled her eyes, but kept smiling, so Draco continued. "For me, it was if things weren't kept to a schedule. If everything wasn't done at exactly the same time every day, I would flip out. It's different for all of us, I guess."

"It's so frustrating. How long did it take you to control it properly, to feel normal again?"

"A few months." Draco chuckled at her groan. "Hey, you're almost there. You do realise you've been an official Alpha for almost three months? And I'm sure in comparison to those first few days, your emotional crashes are less frequent."

Hermione leaned her elbows on the table and pressed her forehead to her palms. "This was how it felt when I learned I was a witch. I was so confused."

"You hid it well," Draco touched her left elbow and she looked up at him. "Maybe this is your normal reaction — confusion at the little things, the things you can't control. And it's perfectly okay. These are, unfortunately, things you can't learn from a book and you have to

rely on your instincts, which you haven't quite mastered yet. But I know you, Granger, and I know you'll figure this out."

"Everyone assumes that, but I'm so lost with this. I can feel the anger rising, but can't seem to stop it without someone else's help."

"It's not a bad thing, asking for help."

"Did you?" Hermione enquired. "Ask for help, I mean."

"Eventually I did," Draco reached out and took both her hands in his. "Blaise was my grounding point. He kept me from tearing my world apart. So if it's Hannah, or one of your other friends, or even if it's *all* of your friends, let them help you."

"But you've been an Alpha for five years, and you still got jealous of Ron and when Cassius asked me out."

Draco smiled and squeezed her hands. "That's different. That's me not wanting anyone else near you and it's something I can't stop."

"But Ron is my friend. I won't stop seeing him just to keep you happy." Hermione tugged her hands from his. "What if one of your girlfriends comes along and wants to talk to you? Can I tell her to shove off? Would you have a problem with that?"

Draco sighed. "This is new territory for me too, so I don't know how it works. But, if my mother's assumptions are correct, and if this thing between us goes forward, Weasley won't be an issue for me. You said the rotting scent on him had already diminished?"

Hermione nodded. "Yeah, I could hardly smell him after the incident with Michael."

"So it's already started." Draco tapped his finger on his chin and smiled. "But how did you feel when that woman approached me at the wedding?"

Hermione made a face; just the memory of that woman pissed her off.

"Jealous?" Draco asked, a tiny smirk on his face.

"Shut up," Hermione laughed. "Maybe I was... just a bit."

"And that might never go away completely for either of us, but I'm sure it'll get easier."

"How did we end up here? I mean, you and me. We weren't exactly friends at school."

Draco laughed. "No, definitely not friends. But Pans and Daph weren't exactly friends with their husbands, either."

"We were such arseholes to each other at school," Hermione began to laugh. "How did it feel to be a ferret?"

"I've no idea what you're talking about," Draco picked up a bread roll and took a large bite, chewing slowly.

"Oh, come on," Hermione reached across the table and patted his hand. "A little blond ferret, all fluffy and cute."

"What about you?" Draco pointed at the top of her head and wrinkled his nose. "Where are your cat ears and your whiskers?"

"You knew about that?"

"Everyone knew about that," Draco laughed at her horrified expression. "You were gone from classes for several weeks. It was hard not to notice."

Hermione stared down at her bowl of soup and began to shake with silent laughter. "Millicent Bulstrode had a cat at Hogwarts... I had no idea."

"I bet you were an adorable cat."

"No, I really wasn't. And it was extremely uncomfortable," Hermione shook her head and laughed harder.

Draco grinned. "Well, I didn't much enjoy being a ferret either. I felt... squashed."

Hermione wiped the tears from her eyes. "Harry, Ron and I should have been expelled in our first year."

"Well..." Draco's eyes sparkled. "You *were* the headmaster's pet."

Hermione snorted. "He had a Phoenix, not a cat."

"That's true," Draco said. "But seriously, the shit you three got away with... I mean, that bullshit in first year when Slytherin should have won the House Cup. You three got rewarded for doing crap any of the rest of us would have gotten detention for."

"That's true," Hermione said with a grin. "But two twelve-year olds and an eleven-year-old defeating a Dark Lord? Those were well-earned points."

"Pfft, a half-arsed Dark Lord. Those points were blatant favouritism."

Hermione leaned forward on her elbows, smirking. "Jealous?"

Draco mirrored her pose. "Hardly."

She laughed and kissed him quickly. "This hasn't been too bad for a first date."

"*First* date?" Draco didn't want to tease and set her off again, but he couldn't help it. "Is that what this is? Because after that kiss last weekend..."

She twisted her lips, fighting her smile, and nodded at his bowl. "Just finish your soup."

Chapter 15

"Two weeks in a cabin in the snow. There was a fire in the fireplace and we were naked most of the time." Pansy flapped her hand in the air, "It was uninteresting. But Hermione and Draco..."

"You were naked most of the time?" Hannah laughed. "And that's *uninteresting*?"

"You're new to the group," Pansy smiled in the sweetly condescending way only Pansy could pull off and not end up hexed. "Harry and I spend most of our time together naked. It's why no one drops in unannounced."

Pansy smirked at Hermione, who winced and shuddered.

"You didn't?" Hannah's eyes went wide.

"My best friend and his newly minted fiancée were... celebrating... on a Tuesday afternoon. On the dining table. I've not used the floo to Grimmauld Place since," Hermione cringed. "I've seen more of Harry Potter's naked arse than I ever wanted to."

Pansy grinned smugly and Hannah cracked up laughing.

"Seriously, I hate you all for not including me in this group sooner."

Hermione smiled, glad that Hannah had fit in so well. She'd been joining them while Pansy was away and Hermione hoped she would continue to do so. On top of being fun, Hannah was the one who could calm her down if the others got too intrusive.

And because this was the first Sunday brunch since Pansy's return from Alaska, she was insistent on knowing everything that had been going on between Hermione and Draco.

"But, anyway. Back to the Granger-Malfoy Alpha debauchery. What's happened?"

"Nothing's happened, and there's certainly been no debauchery," Hermione scowled.

"*Nothing*? Nothing, my arse," Hannah scoffed. "You should see them together, Pans, they're adorable."

"They're all over each other. Can't keep their hands to themselves," Ginny added. "They're not adorable, they're nauseating."

"What?" Hermione glanced around at them all. "We don't touch each other all the time."

Daphne touched Hermione's arm. "Sweetie, you really do."

Hermione scowled. She wasn't always touching him... *was she*?

In the two weeks since he'd kissed her goodnight after the wedding, they'd shared several lunches, had dinners together — and with their friends — and had spent hours just talking. But she couldn't recall during any of those times that they were constantly touching each other.

"I think the two of you do it without even realising," Hannah said. "Every time he's in the shop, he touches your neck or your wrists. And you do the same with him."

"Really?" Hermione was still trying to remember touching him so much, but she couldn't. *Had it become so natural so quickly?*

Ginny and Daphne were nodding in agreement. "Why haven't you noticed?" Daphne asked.

"I didn't even know I was touching him." Hermione shrugged, "Or that he was touching me."

Pansy leaned forward and smirked. "Has he touched those spots that only *female* Alphas have?"

"*No!*" Hermione said a little too quickly and her friends all shared a look that said they didn't believe her. "We're still getting to know each other."

"You've known each other for twelve years! How much more is there to know?" Pansy rolled her eyes.

"Seven of those years he hated me," Hermione reminded her. "And the other five we saw each other maybe a dozen times. I'm not jumping into bed with him just so you lot can live out your fantasies."

"So, you're telling me it's been two weeks since my wedding and you haven't had your hands on Draco's downstairs dragon yet?"

There was a beat of silence. Hermione closed her eyes and shook her head, the other three women burst out laughing.

"Downstairs dragon?" Hannah chuckled.

"Trouser snake?" Pansy suggested. "Crotch cannon? Spunk trumpet?"

"Enough." Hermione held up her hand, stopping any further euphemisms. "And no, Pansy, we've not done anything more than share lunches and dinners, and we've talked."

"Talked? *Gah!*" Pansy groaned. "That's it? That's all you've done? You've talked?"

"Yes, we've talked." Hermione stared Pansy down, hoping her face wasn't giving anything away. She and Draco *had* talked, but as for it being all they'd done, well... it wasn't quite the truth.

Just two nights prior, things did in fact get a little... handsy.

*** HG/DM ***

Friday night and Draco had invited her to dinner at his flat. It was her first time at his since she'd insisted that he only meet her at the shop or at her house. Things had definitely changed since his and Alexander's interview; her shop had almost returned to normal, but she still wasn't quite ready to be seen in public with him yet.

Since their first lunch date in her garden, he'd met her precisely at one each day in her office for lunch. They'd shared several dinners — on one occasion Blaise had joined them and had charmed her, causing some friction between the two men. Draco's jealousy had flared and despite Hermione calming him, Blaise thought it best to leave early. Dinner with her friends hadn't been much better.

Ron had still been an issue. The aroma surrounding him had certainly diminished for her, but for Draco, the scent of her on him had seemed to have grown stronger. Dinner had ended early that night as well.

So, dinners with friends had been halted for their safety.

And Draco had — so far — heeded her request that they get to know each other and hadn't pressured her into anything more. That wasn't to say their post-wedding kiss was the only one they'd shared.

Friday night and he'd surprised her. Friday night they'd had pizza and wine, which seemed so completely out of place in his flat — a flat which was bigger than her house.

The large kitchen/living room was gorgeous and not at all what she'd pictured. She'd expected cold, minimalistic nothingness, but the room was warm and inviting with dark wood floors and furnishings, an entire wall with floor to ceiling bookshelves crammed with books both old and new. The kitchen was pristine, the cabinets matching the dark wood of the bookshelves, and the black marble countertops shone in the soft lighting.

A worn leather sofa and two matching armchairs sat in front of the fireplace, and that was where they'd been sitting for the past hour.

They'd been talking — they never seemed to stop talking. Every lunch, every dinner, they'd chatted constantly. She was fascinated with his business. That he had combined potion making with Herbology had been an innovation that no one else had even considered. He was fortunate that he had money — it had enabled him to purchase land and establish greenhouses and gardens, and had become a revelation in both industries.

He, in turn, had been intrigued to learn why she left the Ministry, why she had walked away from the possibility of becoming *the* Minister.

It hadn't been what she'd thought, she told him. Too much bureaucratic crap and red tape, and old men who didn't want to change the way they did things.

They had talked, had gotten to know each other just a tiny bit more with each date.

And now she was sitting beside him with her legs curled up beneath her, elbow propped on the back of the sofa as they traded easy kisses.

His hand skimmed along her thigh, down to her knee and pulling her leg gently over his. She went easily, straddling his lap and wrapping her arms around his neck. She left space, though — sitting back on his legs — not wanting to allow the aching warmth in her abdomen to dictate where this would go.

It had been almost a month since Draco declared his intention to win her, and she had been suitably impressed by his attention to her. He was more thoughtful than she had realised — although she wasn't sure just how much assistance he was getting from her friends — and his interest and curiosity in her was something she was slowly becoming accustomed to.

And she certainly hadn't been prepared for how much she did want him, how much he wanted her, but she still wasn't ready to cross the boundary she'd set.

But now...

Draco's hands curved around her hips, his fingertips sneaking under the hem of her shirt and pressing into her skin, drawing tight circles before retreating and then following the same path.

Hermione's fingers curled into his hair, her mouth finding the gland at his throat. Draco groaned and the taste of him, the scent of him, curled around her and grew into something she instantly craved more of. She dragged her teeth over his skin and he jerked beneath her, his fingers digging deeper into her hips.

"Granger?" Draco groaned her name as her teeth scraped over the sensitive gland once more.

"I don't want sex. Not tonight," she murmured against the side of his throat. "But I need... something."

He nodded, then gripped her arse and pulled her forward, fitting her tightly against the thick bulge of his erection, causing her to gasp and look up at him. "Too much?"

Hermione shook her head and let out a breathy *no*. The feel of him between her thighs — even if they were fully clothed — touching the place where only her hands had ever been, was scrambling her brain and causing her knickers to become damp. It was a feeling she couldn't quite describe. *Pleasure*? She didn't think so. It went *way* beyond pleasure.

Draco sniffed the air and his jaw clenched. "Shit, Granger. Do you know how good you smell? I could fucking eat you right now."

Hermione's eyes went wide and he chuckled.

"*That* was too much."

She huffed out a laugh. "No, it's just... this is all new and I'm not—"

"Nothing more than you want, okay?" He leaned up and nipped at her jaw. "You can stop this right now if you want. I'll need a seriously cold shower, but you're in control."

She nodded, then squeaked in surprise as his hands became more daring and moved up her ribs, her shirt bunching around her chest when his hands stopped just below her breasts.

"Tell me to stop, okay?" Draco said again.

Hermione stared at him. She could see his words were sincere, that he had no intentions of taking this further than she would allow. And her heart fluttered at the thought. His reaction to their kiss after the wedding had concerned her. The expression of pure lust in his eyes, the growling sound, the restraint it had taken for him to step away — it was a show of pure Alpha dominance, and while she knew she could easily match him, it had still frightened her.

And now, the lust was still there — his eyes were the turquoise colour of the Caribbean Sea — but she could also see the control, the knowledge that she was his, that she wasn't going anywhere. And she knew he would wait.

She pushed his hands away and smiled at the flicker of disappointment in his eyes.

"Sorry," he said. "I got carried away."

Hermione shook her head. "No, I wanted to..."

Her cheeks flushed and her hands went to the buttons on her shirt, slowly unfastening each one as he watched.

His hand covered hers, stopping her. "Granger, are you sure?"

"Just this, okay?" She shook his hand away and freed the last buttons, her eyes never leaving his as she shrugged out of her shirt. "You can't get naked, just this."

"I'm perfectly fine with this." He took a moment to admire the simple white cotton that hid her and swallowed thickly before smiling up at her. "So much more beautiful than I dreamed."

"You dreamed of me?" Hermione wondered and Draco grinned

"*Oh*, I dreamed of you." He ran his hands up her back to cup her shoulders, tilting her backwards and kissing the hollow of her throat. "I dreamed so many things about you."

"Yeah?" Hermione dropped her head back allowing him to trace his tongue across her glands. "What did you dream of?"

"Of you over me." He kissed his way down her chest. "Of you under me. Of me inside you."

"Oh!" She gasped and gripped his hair tightly as his mouth pressed warm, wet kisses to the curve of her breasts.

He glanced up. "Do you want me to stop?"

"No," she said breathlessly. "Keep going."

Draco's hands covered her breasts, cupping her gently, his thumbs teasing back and forth over her nipples through the thin cotton. His fingers traced the edge of her bra. "May I?"

Hermione bit her lip. Her nipples were aching, pressed against his hands, but was she ready for him to soothe that ache?

She smiled. *Oh, she definitely was.*

"Please," she whispered, her breath heavy, her heart pounding in her chest.

He tugged one cup down, and Hermione sucked in a sharp breath as he didn't hesitate to drop his head and take her nipple between his lips. His mouth was warm and wet, his tongue instantly soothing the sharp ache.

She rocked her hips over the hard bulge in his jeans and he groaned into her skin. His mouth sucked harder and her hips rolled forward, and this suddenly felt like more than just a grope on the sofa. This felt like the opening act to what she knew would be a mind-blowing show.

His hand found the other bra cup and tugged it down, his mouth switching to her newly-exposed nipple, drawing it tightly into his mouth. His hands gripped her arse, guiding her over him, urging her to move faster.

And she moved. Her instincts taking over, her insecurities disappearing.

Hermione shoved him back into the sofa and followed, leaning hard against him and burying her face in his neck. Her hips were moving in a frantic rhythm over him, the seam of her jeans was pressed perfectly against her clit, the hard steel of his erection building the friction as she ground her hips, as she rocked, as she chased the feeling she knew only he could give.

"That's it, Darling, take what you want." Draco's voice was low, a rough growl against her shoulder. "Keep moving. Get there."

She whimpered at his endearment. He had only ever called her *Darling* in her dreams. But this wasn't a dream, he was here with her. His scent, his taste, the solid mass of him pressed against her, it was *real*.

She moved, over and over, back and forth, gasping as sparks of pleasure built under her skin, pulsing and burning, setting alight nerves that had been long dormant.

Her breath caught when he pressed a kiss to her cheek and whispered the words she'd only heard in her dream.

Let yourself fall, darling. I'll catch you.

And she fell. Her body jerking, a choked groan vibrating against his skin.

"Draco," she gasped, his hands gripping her hips tightly, his entire body tensing. She continued to move, but he stopped her.

"No," he groaned. "No more."

"Draco... you need..." She could barely speak, but she could sense his need for release. She tried once more to rock her hips, to give him what he clearly needed, but he held her still.

"Draco, please... let me..."

She lifted her head to look at him, his face was strained from holding back. She'd set the boundaries and he was sticking to them.

"It's okay," she whispered. "Let me catch you."

He loosened his grip on her hips and slid his hands along her thighs. He stared up at her, stared for the longest time before he finally nodded.

She shifted her hips, her hand slipping between them, feeling him like granite against his jeans. Her hand caressed him, curled around him, rubbed and squeezed him, pulling groans and hissed words from his throat. He was big — she could tell without having to see him — and solid, throbbing beneath the thick denim. And she wanted it gone. She wanted him naked, wanted to touch his skin and feel him pulsing in her hand. Wanted to feel his release, see the mess on her skin.

But his loud groan and the sharp thrust of his hips told her it was too late.

His arms engulfed her, his mouth finding the spot on her throat and sucking gently. She winced as he held her tighter. The fabric of his shirt was like sandpaper on her overly sensitive nipples and she pulled away.

"Alright?" Draco's eyes flashed with alarm.

"I'm fine," she assured him. "Just a little sensitive."

He glanced down to her chest and nodded. "Sorry. Was I too hard on you?"

Hermione touched his face. "No, not at all. It's just I've never... it was something new, that's all."

Draco righted her bra, sighing as her breasts vanished beneath the cups, pulling the straps back over her shoulders. He wrapped his arms around her. "Can we try again?"

She dropped back to his chest, her head landing on his shoulder. She breathed deeply, the post-orgasm scent of him was incredible. Everything she had previously scented was magnified, sharper, and now laced with the salty sweat on his skin.

"You've never...?" Draco asked quietly.

Hermione curled deeper into him, her hand tracing nervously over the embroidered logo on his shirt. Her thoughts were scattered.

She should tell him.
He would make a big deal of it.
Hannah said it wasn't a big deal.
It shouldn't matter.
It *didn't* matter.

"I've never had anyone so attentive." It wasn't a complete lie. No one *had* ever been attentive to her.

"Yeah?"

Hermione chuckled at the smugness in his voice. "Yeah. You're the only one who's been like that with me."

"Well, I look forward to being with you more, Ms Granger."

Hermione smiled into his chest, knowing that after this preview, *more* would be sooner than he realised.

*** HG/DM ***

"I'm so disappointed in you, Granger." Pansy pursed her lips in disgust. "Here I thought you were this super Alpha woman and would have had Draco tied to the bed, and you've only *talked*?"

"Yes, we've talked," Hermione said then smiled sweetly. "Although, the kiss he landed on me after the wedding was quite something."

Ginny slapped her arm. "You said he escorted you home and that was it!"

"I lied."

"Hermione Granger *lying*? Has Draco corrupted you already?" Daphne pointed a finger at her. "You know you're not leaving here until you tell us."

Hermione rolled her eyes and sighed dramatically. "Fine. He shoved me against my door and kissed the shit out of me. Then he shoved me inside and told me to shut the door so he wouldn't throw me down on the porch and fuck me senseless in front of my neighbours."

They all stared at her with identical stunned expressions and she laughed.

"What?" Hermione shrugged. "You asked."

"Yeah, but..." Pansy was speechless — a first, Hermione noted.

"But...?" Hermione was smirking, the knowledge that she'd managed to shut them all up causing no small amount of pride to surge through her.

"That's a lot to take in," Ginny finally said. "Especially coming from you."

"I'm an... what did you say, Pans? An Alpha super woman?" Hermione was almost gloating. "You might have to get used to some changes."

"Pfft," Pansy found her voice, "Two minutes ago you were telling us, 'no, Draco hasn't touched me, we're just talking,' so, I'm sorry if I don't believe you."

"Two minutes ago you were whinging that I wasn't telling you enough, that *just talking* is boring. But when I tell you something, you don't believe me. What the hell do you want, Pansy?"

Hannah's hand came down over hers, but Hermione shook it away.

"Hermione—" Hannah began, but Hermione cut her off.

"I'm fine. This is not me being angry at a crowd of idiots. This is me being pissed at my friend who can't decide what she wants from me."

Hermione stood, grabbing her bag and reaching inside. She tossed several Galleons on the table and nodded towards them. "That will cover brunch. And when you decide what it is you want to hear from me, please let me know."

She turned, her spine straight, her head held high, and sauntered away.

"Oh, darling, what's happened?"

Hermione had Apparated straight home, had stared at her reflection in the mirror and promptly burst into tears, a massive surge of emotions hitting her hard. She flooded to the Manor where she had been greeted with a low bow from Keely, Narcissa's house elf, before she squeaked that she would '*get the mistress*' and vanished.

She turned from the window, where she'd been staring out over the expansive gardens, and the tears which she had managed to reign in burst forth once more.

Narcissa was beside her in an instant, her arms wrapping around her and hugging her close.

Hermione took several deep, shuddering breaths, and swallowed the lump in her throat. "My friends are arseholes."

Narcissa chuckled. "I've no doubt they are. Pansy especially."

"Pansy especially." Hermione hiccuped and stepped out of Narcissa's embrace.

"I think some tea is in order." Narcissa smiled and looped her arm through Hermione's. "And maybe a long chat."

"Oh! It's Sunday." Hermione's awareness kicked in and she came to her senses. "I'm interrupting your weekend."

"You're interrupting nothing," Narcissa assured her. "Lucius is in his study working and I was in the library."

"You're sure?" Hermione asked and Narcissa squeezed her arm.

"Hermione, darling, you have tamed my son," Narcissa winked at her, "and turned him into the man I hoped he would always be. So, no, you're not interrupting me at all."

Hermione's cheeks flushed. "I'm not sure I'm responsible for that."

"You are *completely* responsible for that." Narcissa guided her through the now familiar hallways, making her smile as they headed for the library instead of the solarium. "My son needed a swift kick in the arse and you gave it to him. His behaviour was deplorable. Now, tell me what's upsetting you."

They sat in the large armchairs by the windows, a tea service already waiting on the small table between them.

"I'm still struggling to keep my emotions in check." Hermione poured the tea for them both, handing Narcissa the cup and settling back into the comfy chair.

"You're still getting angry?"

"No, I seem to have that sorted. But if someone teases me or jokes with me, I turn into a psychopath."

"I'm sure it's not that bad," Narcissa chuckled. "Is that what happened today?"

Hermione nodded. "Yeah, it was silly really. Just Pansy being Pansy. But it riled me and instead of going all dark witch, I snarked at her and when I got home, I burst into tears."

"And that's perfectly okay. In fact, it's probably safer than going dark witch."

Hermione laughed, "I guess, but I hate this feeling. I'm fine one second and the next I'm wanting to tear my friend's head off just because she's teasing me."

"Well, with Pansy, that's understandable. She's never been one to be sensitive to the feelings of others." Narcissa gazed thoughtfully at her. "What did she say that set you off?"

"She was asking about me and Draco. Why we hadn't done... um... why we hadn't..." Hermione's eyes dropped to her lap. She should have thought this through. She couldn't talk to Narcissa about this.

Narcissa reached over and squeezed her arm. "Darling, don't be embarrassed. Draco is my son, but believe me when I say that I would rather not see him in the gossip pages. So whatever you are, or aren't doing, to keep him out of them, I don't care."

"We've not done anything," Hermione murmured, not looking up. "We've talked, we've gotten to know each other better, and Pansy just... she pissed me off when she said it was a ridiculous thing to do."

"As it should have," Narcissa's tone was sharp. "Pansy would do well to mind her business. What you're doing is anything but ridiculous. You and Draco have had a tumultuous relationship until now, so talking and spending time together is a much wiser move than just getting naked and jumping into bed."

Hermione's hands covered her face. "Can you not be his mother? This is completely embarrassing."

Narcissa laughed, "Unfortunately I can't change that. But also, this is far from embarrassing. It's natural to want to be with someone, and don't think you can't ask me anything just because the person you want to be with is my son. And, since he is my son, it means I've had sex at least once."

Hermione dropped her hands from her face and snorted a laugh. "I'm certain it's been more than once... have you seen your husband?"

Narcissa's head rolled back and she burst into laughter as Hermione clapped her hand over her mouth.

"I shouldn't say words." Her voice was muffled behind her hand and her face felt like it was on fire.

"Oh, darling." Narcissa wiped the tears from her eyes. "I *have* seen my husband, and *yes*, it has definitely been more than once."

"I'm so sorry." Hermione was shaking her head. "Damned Malfoy men messing with my out of control emotions."

"Yes, they will do that to you."

"I just don't get it. I've got my anger under control... well almost, and now I have to deal with bursting into tears for no reason and lusting after married men. I'm no better than an Omega in heat."

"An Omega in heat would be lusting after *any* man," Narcissa pointed out. "You're just lusting after the Malfoys." Hermione's jaw dropped as Narcissa winked at her. "And everyone knows why."

"They have money?"

Narcissa laughed again. "There you go. You haven't lost your sense of humour."

"Some days it feels like I have."

"Darling, I know you hear this over and over again, but this *will* get easier, and you *will* find yourself again, I promise." Narcissa leaned across the table and took both Hermione's hands in hers. "Don't let your friends dictate how you should feel or what you should be doing. Only you know the right time and the right person. And that right person will wait for you until you're ready for anything more than talking."

"But I'm an Alpha, I should want... to be with him all the time, shouldn't I?"

Narcissa shook her head. "No, you're a woman. A strong, intelligent, confident woman, and whatever it is that *you* want is the right thing. And no one should try to tell you any different. Not my son, not Pansy, not me."

"I'm just frustrated. I just want everything to be how it was." Hermione looked down at their linked hands. Narcissa Malfoy was the last person she ever suspected would be the one giving her advice in this crazy situation, but her calming manner, her sense of humour, her kind heart, gave Hermione a sense of having a mother in her life again.

"I know, darling. You just need to be patient and I promise everything will be as it should."

Chapter 16

Draco stepped from the Floo and her scent instantly hit him. But it wasn't the usual sweet scent of her, there was something else. Something off, something sour.

He moved quickly down the hallway, his heart rate picking up, a touch of panic setting in. *Was she hurt? Was she in danger?* If she was, he would kill whoever it was that was hurting her.

He couldn't stand it. Just the thought of Hermione being in danger, of someone touching her, hurting her, drew a deep anger from within him. She was *his*. He was *hers*. They had all but settled that fact. They'd been dancing the same dance since the wedding, and the bonding rituals had begun long before that. The first scent of her in the solarium three months ago had been the start of everything for him.

And now, if she was hurt he would—

He came to an abrupt halt at the library door. The scene before him squeezed his heart. He knew his mother had been spending time with her, answering as many of her questions as she could. And he also knew that they had become quite close — Granger had become the daughter his mother had secretly longed for.

But now, Narcissa was holding her hands, talking quietly, comforting her. Granger was clearly upset, her face blotchy and stained with tears.

Her head snapped up, and she gave him a watery smile. "Hey."

Draco crossed instantly to her, squatting beside her chair and taking one hand from his mother's grasp, lightly touching her wrist. "Hey. What's happened?"

"Nothing. I'm just being stupid."

"It's not nothing," Narcissa interjected. "And you're certainly not being stupid." She glanced at Draco, her mouth drawn in a straight line. "Ms Parkinson, once more, doesn't know when to stop talking."

"I thought she would have learned after everything we said in the interview—"

"Oh!" Hermione exclaimed, her face even more distraught. "I never thanked her for that."

Draco glanced at his mother. They both shared the same thought: Hermione Granger was everything. Her empathy had just outweighed her anger and she wasn't even aware of it.

"Granger, you don't owe Pansy anything right now." Draco stood and leaned down to press a kiss to her forehead. "She's angered you and owes you an apology."

Hermione shifted in her seat, hovering her palm over the soft leather and whispering. The chair shook slightly then extended to the side. She smiled up at him. "Can you sit with me? Do you have time?"

"Of course I have time." Draco sat beside her and she curled into his embrace. He closed his eyes and touched his lips to her head. "There's always time."

"I'll leave you two for a bit." Narcissa moved to stand but Hermione stopped her.

"No, please stay. I have so many questions." She chuckled to herself. "I have so many *more* questions."

"I'm not sure there's any left to ask." Draco held her tightly, his anger at Pansy simmering just beneath the surface.

Pansy's sharp tongue had brought trouble down on her more times than Draco could count. He loved his friend dearly, but she was also infuriating. Her show of compassion when suggesting the interview was now completely undone.

Draco was sure Pansy's remarks were no worse than anything she might have said prior to Hermione presenting as an Alpha. But they were all well aware of how up and down Hermione's emotions were, and Pansy should have known to keep her comments to herself.

And he could only imagine what those comments were.

He *was* frustrated that Hermione was holding back. He would never push her. Never. He did understand her reluctance, but he also knew they would be perfect together.

They would always be perfect together.

"What did Pansy say this time?" Draco asked.

"Nothing really," Hermione sighed. "She was just... enquiring as to why we've only talked."

"That's not her business."

"That's what I told her," Narcissa said. "Pansy has been your friend long enough to know when to keep her thoughts to herself."

"She was just teasing." Hermione shrugged. "I think I overreacted."

"Hermione, you didn't overreact," Narcissa replied. "What you did was react to a situation that made you uncomfortable. And if Pansy can't see that what she did was inconsiderate, then she has the issue. Not you."

"I hate this," Hermione complained, huffing out a frustrated breath. "A few months ago I would have just ignored her and not worried about it. But I got pissed and told her when she was ready to tell me exactly what she wanted from me, she should let me know."

"Why do you hate saying that to her?" Draco was dumbfounded. The state Hermione was in, he had expected much worse. "It sounds perfectly reasonable to me."

"But that's not me! I don't rant at people like that."

"You've stood up for yourself before now, I'm sure." Narcissa's expression was as confused as his.

"I have. But sometimes it's just easier to ignore things, especially Pansy."

"It doesn't appear that you did anything wrong," Draco assured her. "And Pansy could do with a few days of worrying whether you're going to rip her a new one or not."

There was a light knock on the doorframe and they all looked up. His father was grinning at him.

"Draco, I wasn't aware you were already here." Lucius smiled and nodded at Hermione. "Ms Granger is quite the distraction, I see."

Draco noticed Hermione avert her eyes, then frowned when his mother began to laugh.

"Darling, please don't be embarrassed," Narcissa said with a reassuring smile.

He glanced between the two women. Granger's cheeks were tinged pink and his mother seemed to be delighting in her discomfort.

"Did we miss something?"

"Hermione might have mentioned that your father is quite the catch." Narcissa was trying — unsuccessfully — to control her laughter.

"Really now?" Lucius sounded amused. He aimed his cane at the armchair across the room and it slid towards him, stopping beside Narcissa, and he sat down. "Does Ms Granger—"

"It's Hermione." Her voice was small and Draco could sense her embarrassment, but he could also sense a hint of something else. *Attraction?*

"Very well." Lucius smiled and nodded at her. "Does Herm—"

"No! It's *not* 'very well.'" Draco glared at his father and tightened his arm around Hermione.

"It's okay, Draco." Hermione reached for his free hand, linking their fingers. "At least I think it is."

"It is," Narcissa said and Draco cringed under her glare. "Hermione reacts to your father as she does because she's attracted to you. You are his son, therefore he carries similar scents to you. And in the state she is currently in, the Alpha side of her is finding it difficult to differentiate. But you'll be pleased to know that she is also repulsed by him because of me."

"There's nothing repulsive about you, my darling," Lucius said defensively.

"I agree," Hermione replied. "Narcissa separately from you doesn't even register with me. Well, she almost doesn't. I can scent jasmine and ivy, and something spicy, like pepper. You're also on her, but it's like a ghost — something that's there but at the same time isn't. With you, I can smell similar scents as I do on Draco, but underneath it all is Narcissa. That's what repulses me. Not her, but the scent of her on you. I know you're married to her. I know that you're not who I want to be with, but as Narcissa's explained, the closeness of your genes, along with Draco's, is what's making it difficult."

"I'm making it uncomfortable for you?" Lucius looked apologetic. "I'll leave you be."

"No, it's fine. Honestly. With Draco here, it's not as confusing."

"If you're sure, Ms Grang—Hermione."

"I am, Lucius." She smiled up at Draco. "And you don't have to strangle me."

"She's right, Draco." Lucius was taking no small amount of pleasure in Draco's possessiveness. "I have no intentions of stealing Hermione from you. I have my own force of nature to deal with."

Draco watched as his mother smiled, scrunching her nose at his father and sharing the same look of adoration they always did. After twenty-six years of marriage he'd have assumed the spark would die but with Narcissa and Lucius, it was still well and truly alight.

"Now, you have some more questions, darling?" Narcissa — sensing a long conversation — called for Keely to refresh the tea.

"Yeah, actually I do." Hermione sat up and grinned at Draco. "I wanted to know how this one was when he first changed. He gets very vague when I ask him. All he'll tell me is that Blaise was his anchor, and that he hated not being in control. But he won't tell me what he got up to."

"Oh, does he now?" Lucius leaned his elbows on the arms of the chair and steepled his fingers together. "That's very unlike Draco to not want to brag about his escapades."

"Father, Hermione doesn't need to know about any of that." Draco tensed. His parents had borne the brunt of his behaviour when his Alpha side presented and he didn't need them to share that knowledge with her — it was something akin to showing her his baby pictures.

"She only had to read page six each Sunday to know anything about you," Lucius countered. "Your life has not exactly been a well-kept secret."

Draco shifted uncomfortably beside Hermione. He didn't want to talk about this with his parents involved. He didn't want to talk about it at all, but knew that it would be a conversation they would have to eventually have. So he tried to deflect in the meantime. "My scandalous past is exactly that. My past. If Granger read about it, then you've nothing left to tell her."

"Oh, I didn't read about it. I wasn't particularly interested in your many conquests." Hermione paused and glanced at Lucius, grinning. "How many conquests were there?"

"More than you'd care to know." Lucius tapped his nose conspiratorially.

"Lucius..." Narcissa warned, but Hermione had already pulled away from Draco, arching an eyebrow.

"Maybe I *should* have read more about you."

"It's no secret there have been other women in my life, though not as many as my father would have you believe, and if it's something you care to know, it's a conversation we can have later." He shot his father a pointed glare.

"Maybe it's a conversation we should have now." Her tone was sharper than he had expected and he sensed her brewing anger.

"You have already asked me about all the women you think I've been with, Granger. I believe it was in your office, while you were hurling insults at me." Draco pursed his lips reigning in his own anger. "And, for the record, I've not enquired about *your* past."

"That's because my past isn't a sordid mess of names I don't remember." Hermione untangled herself from his arms and stood, her eyes growing darker by the second.

"A sordid mess? How would you know that? You said you didn't read anything about me." Draco stood, looming over her, fighting to keep his voice calm.

"I don't need to read anything." She backed away slowly, her hands clenching and unclenching at her sides. "Your father is clearly disgusted with you."

"So my father's word is good, but mine isn't?"

"At least he's being truthful. But, as usual, when you're confronted with something you don't like, you do your best to hide."

Draco's own hand clenched, a surge of magic coursing through him. "If he's so incredibly truthful, maybe you should pursue *him* then."

"Ah, I'm sitting right here." Lucius said but they both ignored him. Narcissa glanced warily in his direction and her expression couldn't have been clearer: this wasn't the time.

"Maybe I will, he seems to be the more *mature* choice," Hermione spat, but Draco didn't miss the flash of apology in her eyes as she glanced at his mother. She wasn't serious — he knew that — but her response still stung. "I can't even look at you right now. You told me I could ask you anything about this, but when I ask for some truths, you run and hide like the cowardly schoolboy you once were."

Her eyes held his for a beat, then she spun around and stomped into the Floo. She shook her head in disgust and then she was gone.

"Well done, Father." Draco was furious. "You couldn't help yourself, could you? You just had to do your best to make me look like an arse. She's only just started to truly trust me and you fucked it all up!"

"I've done nothing of the sort." Lucius was smiling smugly at him.

Draco goggled in disbelief. "You've done nothing? You... arrogant piece of... you should have kept your mouth shut. She didn't need to know any of that."

"Firstly, she *does* in fact need to know. Acknowledging — and admitting to — your past is necessary if you want her to trust you completely." Lucius stood from his chair and stepped in front of his son, not intimidated at all by Draco's solid frame. "And secondly, she needed to be angry."

"Angry?" Narcissa stood beside Draco and glared at Lucius. "You know what happens to her when she's angry. She's still only learning to control herself."

"Have you both forgotten?" Lucius shook his head and replied, "When Draco was driving us to our last tether in those first months, we angered him by asking him to remove himself from our home. It was what he needed to pull himself together. Hermione no longer needs the coddling—"

"We're not coddling her," Draco snapped. "She's struggling and needs help."

"A month ago, I would have agreed with you. But what she actually needs is to feel angry and hurt and upset, and she needs to experience those things without you all stopping her. She is both strong and resilient and what she *doesn't* need is for everyone to be placating her every mood. She needs to work through them and realise she is capable of feeling all those things and controlling them."

They both stared at him, stunned.

"You both know that I'm right." Lucius touched Draco's chest. "It happened with you, Draco, and our refraining from bending to your every whim was what allowed you to finally stand on your own feet."

"So we should all stop being so careful with her?" Draco looked at his father with doubt. He hated to see Hermione emotional and upset, and his need to comfort her was overwhelming.

"Yes. It's exactly what she needs. And it's what you need. You've said it yourself. She's an Alpha, Draco, not an Omega. She doesn't need to be protected or hidden away from the world. What she needs is to be shown who she truly is, and only you can do that."

"I don't know... how do I show her?"

"You go to her." Lucius nodded towards the Floo. "You tell her that she needs only to be Hermione Granger and that she doesn't need to be the person she thinks everyone wants to see."

"I'm so sorry."

Draco stepped out of the Floo into Hermione's house and, instead of dodging hexes as he assumed he would be, he found himself engulfed in her embrace.

"Draco, I'm so sorry. What I said was uncalled for, you're not a coward and your past doesn't matter and I shouldn't have—"

"Slow down." Draco's hands cupped her jaw, his thumbs lightly caressed her cheeks. "You don't need to be sorry. I was as much to blame as..."

He trailed off, his father's words echoing inside his head.

...what she doesn't need is for everyone to be placating her every mood...

Draco dropped his hands from her face and stepped back. "Actually, you're right. You *do* owe me an apology. What you said *was* uncalled for. I'm happy to have a conversation with you regarding my past; I just didn't need to have it with my parents in the room."

She stared at him like she was waiting for the punchline. But when it didn't come, she took her own step back.

"Why are you such an arse?"

Draco shrugged one shoulder. "I'm no more of an arse than you are."

"Wow." Her hand fisted at her side. "And so mature."

Draco smirked. "This thing you have for mature men... maybe my mother *should* be concerned."

"Fuck you, Malfoy!" She raised her hand, her fingers twitching. "You have three seconds to get out of my house."

"Or you'll what?" Draco goaded. "Put me through a wall? *Stupefy* me? Make my dick limp so you'll never know how good it feels—" he growled as his back crashed into the wall, his body rigid, his arms locked against his sides. "—inside you?"

"You won't be putting your dick anywhere near me, you foul, loathsome, evil little cockroach."

"Can't come up with anything new, huh?" He laughed, raising an eyebrow as thin ropes began to twist around his arms and torso. "Tying me up already, Granger? A little eager, aren't you?"

He laughed again at the expression of horror on her face. The ropes instantly disappeared and the modified Body-Bind holding him vanished.

"What is wrong with you?" Her voice trembled and he could see she was fighting back tears. "Why are you doing this?"

"There's nothing wrong with *me*." He moved slowly towards her. "*You* have the problem here. You need to realise who you are. You need to show the Michael Corners of the world that you won't take their shit. You need to believe in yourself."

"I don't know how."

"You *do* know how. You just had me shoved against the wall without even thinking about it." He moved closer still. "You are Hermione Granger. It's about time you remembered that."

She stared at him, shaking her head.

"No," he told her. "Do not shake your head. Are you angry? Hurt? Upset? Did you want to *Avada* me right now?"

She nodded. "All of it."

"Then feel it. Be angry and hurt and upset." He grinned. "I hope you don't *Avada* me, but you need to be angry at me. I deserve it. I deserve it for everything I've ever said and done to you."

"You've been kind as of late." She gave him a small smile.

"No, try again."

"But you—"

"Granger, don't." Draco gripped her shoulders. "Don't make excuses. Tell me exactly how you feel."

"I don't like you very much right now," she said quietly. "You were always awful to me and that's how this feels... and..."

Draco nodded. "And?"

"And if it wasn't Unforgivable, I'd throw a *Cruciatus* at you."

"Keep going. Get it all out," Draco encouraged.

"I don't understand any of this. Certainly not why you would even want to be near me, since you didn't want to before." She took a deep breath. "I feel like this is all wrong. The way you treated me — the way your parents treated me — you would deserve to be tortured." She absently touched her forearm, a gesture that made Draco wince. "And I can't help but think that any second you'll realise I'm just a filthy Mudblood and throw me aside. I mean, you weren't even interested in me until my Alpha status developed."

"And you're right, I wasn't," Draco admitted. "I was too busy whoring myself around to take notice of anyone but myself."

"And that's another thing." She shrugged out of his grip and put some distance between them. "I don't care how many other women there have been, but I care that you're trying to hide it from me."

"It hasn't been deliberate."

"After today, it *feels* deliberate." Her hand balled into a tight fist again. "We can't do this, Draco, if you're going to shut down when I want to know something that makes you uncomfortable."

"What about you?" Draco asked. "You're hiding behind your new-found status to excuse the fact you've forgotten who you are."

"I've not forgotten who I am." Her eyes flashed with another surge of anger.

"Oh, you can tell yourself that, but you have. You've never been afraid of anything. You showed Corner who you are, and I'm sure Pansy needed to be put in her place. And all those people who think they can have a piece of you? You've certainly shown them they're wrong."

"Exactly. So as you can see, I've *not* lost myself."

"But you always apologise, always say the angry side is not who you are," Draco pointed out. "But it *is* who you are. I've seen you angry — experienced it first-hand — and it's something you should never apologise for. You're too busy caring about everyone else to see that you've lost who you once were."

"So this is what you went through? The confusion?"

"I did. And I was probably as bad as you were, except I was so focused on myself, I didn't care about anyone else. It was why my parents asked me to leave the Manor. I was incorrigible."

"Nothing's changed there, then."

Draco chuckled. "No, not much at all. But unfortunately, you have changed."

Hermione sighed, all the tension leaving her shoulders, and her head dropped forward. "I don't know how to go back. I've been nothing but Alpha Hermione lately. I don't know how to be anything else anymore."

"You do know how." Draco dared to close the distance between them, touching his fingers to her chin and tilting her face to look at him. "You've always known what you want and you still do. You just have to take charge and believe in yourself again."

"Take charge?"

"Take charge. Be strong and resilient. Be Hermione Granger."

"Strong... resilient," she whispered. "Hermione Granger."

She reached up and grazed her fingers over the gland at his throat, her hand sliding to the back of his neck and pulling him down to her. He went easily, her mouth covering his in a fierce, possessive kiss.

"I *am* Hermione Granger." She pulled away and stared up at him. "I am strong. I am resilient and I know what I want."

Draco's heart picked up. "And what do you want?"

"You." She gripped his shirt and tore it open, several buttons skittering across the floor.

Draco stared at her for several seconds. A low growl vibrated in his chest, and he took her shirt in his hands and imitated her, ripping it open and shoving it down her arms. His hands immediately went to her breasts, thumbs sliding back and forth over her already tight nipples.

"This is not the couch," Hermione almost growled and pushed into his palms. "I want you naked, and I want you fucking me."

Her hands flew to his belt, making quick work of the buckle and whipping the leather free of the loops.

"Fuck," he swore in surprise, his fingers gripping the cups of her bra and yanking it down. He leaned in close, flicking his tongue across her throat. "Unless you want me to fuck you in your kitchen, you should Apparate us to your bedroom. Now."

They were upstairs in a heartbeat, her hands still working on his zipper, shoving his trousers down his legs and squeezing him through his boxers. Another low growl escaped him, and with a whisper, she was naked.

"Well, if we're cheating..."

His remaining clothes vanished and they stood naked before each other.

Hermione bit her lip and reached her fingers to his chest, tracing the jagged scars that marred his skin. "You didn't have scars in my dream."

"You dreamed of me?"

She nodded, her teeth working her lip in a way that made Draco want to kiss her. He thumbed her lip, following his touch with his mouth, kissing her deeply. He hadn't wanted to slow things down, but his simple kiss did.

Her hands slid around his waist, pulling him close, their naked skin finally pressed together. His hands lifted to cup her jaw, his tongue licking the seam of her lips, seeking entrance. She opened and his tongue found hers, touching, tasting, groaning as the scent of her began to float around him.

He lifted her, carrying her to the bed and lowering her gently. "You're in control here. Whatever you want."

She nodded and pressed a hand to his chest, smiling as she silently asked him to roll to his back. He answered her smile with one of his own, leaning down to kiss her once more before giving in and falling to the mattress.

Hermione lifted herself to straddle him, her eyes never leaving his. "If I said I wanted to stop, would you?"

Draco swallowed. "Of course. I said you're in control and I meant it."

"Thank you." She smiled and leaned down, her taut nipples brushing against his chest, pulling a hiss of breath from him. She ran her nose along his throat, inhaling deeply. "You smell incredible."

"So do you." He gripped her hips. "Are you ready for this?"

In a moment of déjà vu, she lifted off his chest and spread her legs wider, taking his hand and pressing it to the inside of her thigh.

"Get me ready."

"Fucking hell," he groaned, hardly able to believe his dream was actually coming true. She looked incredible above him; her eyes were golden, her face flushed, her hips already moving, wanting his hands to touch her.

His fingers slipped over the sensitive gland and she sighed, her head dropped forward, her eyes fluttering closed.

"How does that feel?"

She nodded slowly, her breath catching as his fingers moved higher and touched her intimate skin. She was warm and wet and ready for him. Her eyes flew open and she looked up at him as he slipped one finger inside the slick warmth.

"Okay?"

She nodded, sucking in a gasp of air when he added another finger and slid them slowly in and out of her.

"Draco... this feels... *oh*, I didn't know..."

She curled her fingers into his chest, her hips moving with his hand, and Draco watched in awe as words fell from her lips incoherently.

"I need... Draco..."

"Tell me, Darling. What do you need?"

She lifted her hips, her eyes dropping to where his fingers were buried inside her. "I need you inside me."

Draco's fingers dragged over the soft place within her that caused her to shiver, his thumb flicked over her clit and she cried out his name. "My fingers are inside you, is that not enough?"

She cried out again when his fingers curled and his thumb pressed down. "No... you... I need you." She dragged his hand away. "Help me, please?"

Draco reached between them, holding himself up for her. She watched as she lowered her hips, the very tip of him pushing inside her. He thrust his hips up, just as Hermione sank down over him and whispered his name.

She looked up, her golden eyes shining, but he knew his face didn't hold the same expression. She was fucking tight, too tight, and the Alpha in him *knew*.

She'd not been with anyone else. *Ever*.

He stared at the place where they were joined, struggling for control. How was it possible? Why had she waited? Why didn't she tell him?

"You're... *untouched*?" he ground out through gritted teeth.

She nodded, her voice breathy when she told him, "It's not a big deal."

"Granger... it is... *oh, fuck!*" He choked out her name, sitting up and flipping them over. "Sorry, I'm so sorry."

His mouth went to the gland on her throat, his murmurs of 'sorry' falling like a chant against her skin.

"Draco... what—" Hermione cried out sharply as he thrust hard against her. "*Oh fuck!*"

"Fuck! Granger, I'm sorry, sorry, I'm so sorry." He felt her body stretch, felt the thick knot at the base of his cock lock inside her. "Sorry, sorry Granger, sorry."

"Draco!" Her back curved into a sharp arc, her fingernails scratching down his back, her slick walls clamping around him.

"It's too... *oh fuck!* Sorry!"

Draco shuddered, throwing his head back, a feral growl filling the air between them. His cock swelled almost painfully, his balls pulling up tightly, and he came inside her with a force he'd never experienced before. His vision blurred as he spilled, and spilled, and spilled inside her, filling her completely. His body trembled and stars flashed in his vision, and he wondered if the pleasure would ever stop.

He finally collapsed onto her, his head spinning, his breath coming in great gasps. This wasn't happening. It had been... less than a *fucking* minute?

She would hate him.

But she surprised him. Her arms and legs wrapped around him, and she kissed the side of his neck. Her voice was steady, if a little breathless.

"What just happened?"

Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"What just happened?"

Hermione luxuriated under the weight of him, but after all she'd read regarding Alphas in bed, she was confused. She'd expected hours of touching and tasting, sweaty bodies and breathlessness, not two thrusts and a sprint to the finish in only half a minute.

Draco groaned, his tongue swiping over her gland once more, before sliding his arms beneath her, gripping her tightly and rolling them over. She made to move off him, but he grabbed her quickly, holding her in place.

"No," he grunted. "You can't move yet. We'll both be hurt.... if you're not already."

Hermione frowned at him. "We can't move?"

"I'm locked inside you, and I've no idea how long for."

"Oh," she said quietly, then reached her hand out, whispering an incantation. The bedcovers instantly cocooned around them and she curled herself against his chest, letting the spicy scent of him wash over her.

"I'm okay," she finally told him. "A bit... stretched... but okay."

"Fuck," he whispered quietly then kissed the top of her head. "I'm so sorry."

"What happened? Why are you sorry?"

"I didn't know." She heard his throat click as he swallowed thickly.

"You didn't know what?" She lifted her head from his chest, her heart dropping at the pained expression on his face. "Oh, *that*. It's not a big deal, Draco. It's not some sacred gift I gave you."

"You might not think so, but in the world of Alphas, it is."

She tried to sit up, but the movement caused a stab of pain between her thighs. She winced and Draco's hands held her steady.

"You *are* hurt." His eyes grew dark, angry at himself for what happened.

"No, honestly, I'm not." She shifted her shoulders, folding her arms over his chest and resting her chin on her hands. "Tell me what's going on."

Draco brushed his fingers in lazy patterns on her hips. "This is in no way your fault, okay?" She nodded and he continued, "But, in the Alpha world, what just happened was a natural instinct. No one else has had you, and I didn't realise, so when you took me inside you, the Alpha took over."

"So, my virginity *was* a big deal?"

"Yes and no." Draco's hands journeyed up her back. "In the real world, I guess not."

She grinned. "You *guess* not?"

"You don't seem too troubled by it," he said. "No big deal, that's what you said."

"I did." She traced her finger along the scar that ran from his left collarbone to his right pec.

"Maybe men make a bigger deal of it than women," Draco mused. "You don't seem concerned about it at all."

"I'm not. And it's *not* a big deal. Or at least it wasn't to me. But apparently in this world, it is."

"What do you know about Alpha men when it comes to... this?"

"*This*? Meaning sex?" Hermione giggled. "You can say it, Draco. I mean, you're still inside me."

Draco pinched her hip, making her squirm, and immediately regretted it. Her movement caused them both to groan painfully.

"What I've read about male Alphas..." Hermione said, "is that they're very, *um*, well-endowed." She squeezed her internal muscles, pulling a groan from him. "Check. And, I also read that male Alphas are amazing lovers." She kissed his chest. "Also, check."

"You're being far too generous."

"You're not well-endowed?"

Draco chuckled. "I think you're well aware of my... endowment."

"This is true." Hermione gave him another internal hug. "Male Alphas are also known to last for hours, but we might need to work up to that."

"Fucking hell," Draco growled. "I fucked up royally and you're being your usual forgiving self about it."

"Just tell me why this happened, please."

Draco nodded. "As I said, my instincts took over. No other man has had you, and in that one moment, nothing else mattered - I needed to be as deep inside you as possible, to plant my seed immediately and ensure you would be mine."

"Plant your seed?" Hermione's eyes went wide. "Is that something you want? The... *ah*... result of seed planting?"

Draco frowned. "Seed plant—*Oh! Ah*, no. Not right now. Not yet. Unless you..."

"Absolutely not. Well, not right now either." She tapped a finger on his chest. "So, instincts?"

"Yeah, instincts. Unfortunately, in this situation, it comes down to base level instincts." Draco pressed his nose to her forehead and breathed deeply. "And those instincts are simple."

"Really? How simple?" Hermione lifted her head and smirked at him, knowing exactly what those *base* instincts were.

"As simple as it gets." Draco matched her smirk.

"Fill me with your seed and procreate?"

"To put it bluntly, yes." Draco closed his eyes. "I'm so sorry, Granger."

"Draco, how is this your fault?" She kissed his warm skin and soothed her fingers across his neck, resting her head back on his chest. "You didn't know, and neither did I. If I had known it *was* a big deal, I would have told you. I'm not sure it would have been any different, but we would have been prepared."

"And I still would have hurt you." His arms wrapped around her, holding her tightly.

"It didn't hurt, not like I expected in any case." She snuggled into him, his scent returning to the argan, vanilla and rainforest she was so familiar with. "All the stories you hear... excruciating pain, burning and stretching, bodies adjusting... what we just did, was none of that."

"It wasn't all that great, though."

"Hmm, I must say, I thought you might last a little longer."

"I'll slap your arse, Granger. As soon as we're separated, you'll be wearing my handprint."

"Is that how you mark me?" she asked cheekily. "Do I have to show my bum in public so everyone knows I'm yours?"

"Not bloody likely." Draco's hand slid down to the curve of her arse. "No one sees this except me."

"Well, no one has ever seen it."

Draco's fingers tangled into her hair, caressing her scalp in a way that made her want to purr. He made a bewildered humming sound. "How is that even possible? I mean shit, Granger, you could have any man on the planet. Why'd you wait?"

"No one ever felt right," she replied honestly her eyes closing as his hand continued to massage through her hair. "Besides, very few men ever asked me out. I think I scared them."

"And I was one of those men."

A long silence fell between them and Hermione had several questions running through her head.

"Just ask me," Draco murmured.

"What?"

"I know you have questions. I'm sure you already had them, but my father brought them all to the surface. So ask me."

"I'm not sure it's appropriate right now. I do want to ask you, but I don't think it's appropriate while we're... locked together."

"Okay, but please ask when you're ready. Let's not have any more secrets between us." His hands moved from her hair to her back, moving gently down her ribs, around her hips and back up her spine. "I should have asked you out. I should have done so many things differently."

"S'alright. You didn't like me very much." Hermione's eyes were growing heavy. His hands on her, his scent surrounding her, and the warmth of his body were all lulling her into a dozy stupor.

"Granger, are you falling asleep?"

"Mhmm," she murmured sleepily. "You're warm.. and... hands... keep doing that."

Her body relaxed, the feeling of him still locked inside her was exquisite. She wanted to ask him if they could stay locked together permanently, but sleep took her, Draco's deep voice whispering into the quiet space they occupied.

"I'll never stop doing anything for you, Darling."

"Darling, wake up."

"No," she muttered. She was warm and cozy and relaxed — he was the best pillow she'd ever slept on.

Draco laughed, the sound rumbling through his chest and shaking her awake. "Granger, wake your lazy arse up."

"No," she said again. "I'm not moving and you can't make me."

Draco squeezed her arse. "You don't have a choice, we have to move."

He shifted beneath her and she felt his knot release from inside her. Her body shuddered and she sighed. As insane as it had been, she really didn't want him to leave her. She squeezed her thighs tightly against him, holding him inside her, not caring about his protests. "I'm not not moving, Malfoy."

"Fucking stubborn witch," he growled, wrapping his arms around her waist and sitting up.

Hermione yelped in surprise, her arms quickly surrounding his shoulders. "What the hell are you doing?"

"I told you, we have to move." He glanced over her shoulder. "Where's your bathroom?"

"Bathroom?" She frowned.

"Well, Brightest Witch," he glanced quickly down between them. "This is going to be messy, we're definitely going to need a shower." Her cheeks flamed and he laughed. "Now, now, Granger. Nothing to be embarrassed about, not when I'm still inside you."

"Down the hallway," she muttered and then protested when he moved to stand. "I'm sure I can walk."

"Oh, I'm positive you can, but as I said, messy. Now wrap your legs around me."

"I hate you right now," she grumbled, embarrassed at not realising what the aftermath of his enthusiasm would entail.

"No you don't." He kissed her and stood, keeping them joined as he carried her down the short hallway. He started the shower, laughing at her expression as she began to squirm uncomfortably against him.

"This is... weird." Hermione held her hand out to check the water temperature, then nodded that she was satisfied. "Is there always, *ah*, so much?"

"Not usually, no." He stepped under the water, turning so the spray hit them both. "Lower your legs, slowly."

Her legs were stiff, her hips aching from being in the same position for so long. She groaned, then winced when he slipped out of her and lowered her to the tiles, holding her steady. "How long was I asleep?"

"About twenty minutes." He reached one hand out to the wall, his own legs slightly unsteady.

"Seriously? It felt like hours."

"I'm good, but not *that* good," he winked, then laughed as her hand slapped his chest. "You're okay?"

"Yeah." She grimaced at the feeling of his orgasm running down her thighs. "Has this happened every time you've knotted inside someone?"

Draco shook his head and reached for the soap. "I've never knotted inside anyone else."

He lathered his hands and began to wash her shoulders. Hermione grabbed his wrists, stopping him.

"What?"

He smiled down at her. "You're the first."

Her jaw dropped open. He hadn't knotted in anyone else. It was a revelation that floored her.

"But... why?"

"No one felt right," he repeated her words from earlier. "But you, Darling, certainly felt right."

She dropped her gaze to hide her smile, but it wasn't the best move. They were in the shower. Naked. And he was.... downstairs dragon may have been incorrect. Anaconda was more apt.

The rumours surrounding Alpha... parts... were grossly understated. He was enormous. Even now, spent and limp, it was still hanging proudly. Long and thick, he was uncut and nestled against the twin weights hanging below. The blond hair on his navel — now damp and sticking to his skin — trailed down and circled the base.

He was fucking perfect. Masculinity in its most beautiful form.

Her fingers touched him tentatively. *That* had just been inside her; she was surprised she wasn't split in two. How the hell *had* it fit inside her? Did she have some kind of magic Alpha vagina?

His stomach clenched when she grazed the still evident knot at the base. She looked up at him to find him watching her fingers, his eyes becoming lighter.

"Sorry," she whispered and pulled her hand away.

"Touch me all you want, Granger." He circled her wrist and tugged her hand back towards him. "Just don't be surprised if I get a little excited."

Hermione yanked her hand away again. "*Ah*, no. You're not putting *that* anywhere near me for quite a while." She took a step back and — forgetting momentarily she was in the shower — crashed into the tiled wall, cringing at the flash of pain the quick movement had caused. Draco's expression instantly changed from amused to concerned.

"I *did* hurt you," One hand went to the gland at her throat, his fingers pressing gently. The other reached between her thighs, but she stopped him.

"No," she said a little sharply. "I'm fine."

"You're anything but fine." His voice was grave and he pleaded with her. "Please let me help."

"Draco, I'm not hurt, just a bit sore," She huffed out a laugh, trying to ease the tension that had built. "I'm sure all virgins have to deal with it."

But Draco was having none of it. "Hermione, Darling, you're hurt because of me. I can help, will you please let me?"

Her breath came out in a shuddering exhale and she relented. "Not inside me, please?"

Draco nodded. "I promise. It's just a simple healing charm."

His eyes never left hers as his hand cupped her between her thighs. One finger pressed gently over her entrance and she winced.

"Draco—"

"Not inside you." He leaned his forehead on hers and whispered a simple charm, the magic flowing into her and the ache melting away. "I'm so sorry, Granger. I never meant to hurt you."

"I know." She wrapped her arms around his neck, holding him close. "And now you've healed me. But it might be awhile before we do that again. My poor, virgin, Alpha vagina needs a rest."

She felt his smile against her shoulder. "That would only be Alpha vagina now. The virgin part is gone."

"It is gone." Hermione pulled back to look at him. "And I know I said it's not a big deal... but I'm glad it was you."

Hermione sat curled in the corner of the sofa, her legs tucked under her, while she stared blankly out the window, her forgotten tea growing cold on the side table.

She'd dressed after their shower in a pair of warm, flannel pyjama pants and her favourite Gryffindor fleecy jumper — much to Draco's disgust — not caring that it was barely two in the afternoon.

Draco had Flooed home, leaving his shredded shirt on the living room floor, and leaving Hermione with the breathing space she needed. He must have sensed it - he could have easily transfigured his shirt and suit into something comfortable, but instead he'd kissed her quickly and told her he'd be right back.

Hermione had watched as he disappeared into the Floo then closed her eyes, taking a much needed deep breath.

Her day had been one that would definitely be filed under crazy.

All the emotions she'd felt in the months following her presentation had condensed themselves into the last few hours. Confusion, hurt, anger, embarrassment, fear — it was all there. And condensed as those feelings were, her anxiety heightened at her complete lack of control.

But then there was Draco.

Even after picking a ridiculous fight with him — a fight with which he should have been much more incensed than he had been — he had been patient, had allowed her to say things that needed to be said. And instead of holding judgment over those things, he encouraged her to say even more, to get her feelings out.

The only feeling that remained was confusion.

Confusion at why she felt so drawn to her childhood tormentor. She knew in part it was the Alpha attraction, but she was also aware that her own feelings — the ones not driven by scent and insane hormones — were directed only towards him. And she knew those feelings were real because they had her spiraling in a way that she hadn't with anyone else. She was falling towards him in a rush that was quickly becoming more than just Alpha lust.

A rush that she didn't want to end.

It was addictive — *he* was addictive — leaving her breathless and wanting more.

But it was also more than just the breathless wanting. It was him. That she hadn't been alone in dealing with the changes, that he had become a voice of reason and helped her see that she was allowing the insanity to rule her life, was a blessing. He had been through it all and survived. Her friends had been supportive, as had Narcissa, but none of them really knew what it was like.

He knew what she was going through. And despite the rocky start, he had been supportive, had calmed her, and had given her the kick in the arse she needed.

And what came after that kick... his mouth kissing her, his hands touching her, his body inside hers... it had been incredible.

Her cheeks warmed at the thought. It was over much quicker than she had expected, but oh, the feeling of him inside her...

The pain hadn't been there — the stretching, pulling, burning pain that she'd both read and been told about. She assumed it was the Alpha side of her, some kind of natural instinct that allowed her body to accept him easily.

And the pleasure of it — of him. She'd only experienced half a minute of it and could only imagine what he would do when she was ready to give him the chance again.

She closed her eyes and exhaled slowly, her body reacting to her own thoughts. Would it be hours like the rumours said? Would he be gentle knowing her inexperience? Or would he take her like he did in her dreams? Hard and fast, and making her scream.

She wasn't sure what she wanted more.

The sound of the Floo pulled her from her thoughts, and Draco emerged dressed in sweatpants and a hoodie. His feet were bare and his hair was still messy from the towel he'd dried it with. He'd argued that if she got to wear comfortable clothing, he should too.

Hermione was staring at him, completely stunned.

He laughed at her expression. "I don't think you would be more shocked if I stepped out of there naked."

"But... those are muggle clothes."

He looked down at himself. "They are, and they're deceptively comfortable... I would once have never thought so."

"And do you have to work later?" Hermione asked, eyeing the suit bag that was draped over his arm.

"Nope." He smiled and folded it over the back of a chair before disappearing into the kitchen. She heard the clink of china, heard water being poured, the fridge opening then closing several seconds later. She smiled. He was making himself at home.

"I have to work tomorrow," he informed her, returning to the living room, slouching beside her on the sofa.

"So you're...?"

"Staying here with you?" He squeezed her foot. "That is correct."

"That is pretty presumptuous of you." She arched one eyebrow. "Maybe I don't want you staying here."

"Too bad." He pulled her feet into his lap, his fingers massaging the soles. "You're stuck with me, Granger. Your bed is awfully comfortable and the body that was in it with me was quite pleasant."

"Quite pleasant?" She poked him in the ribs with her toe. "That's all I get? *Quite pleasant?*"

"*Incredibly* pleasant?"

"Funny." She nodded towards her feet where his hands had stopped moving, silently telling him to continue. "The body with *me* was fucking incredible, however the show was a let down."

"Rude." Draco pinched her ankle and she squirmed. "If the body that was with me hadn't been so fucking tight and wet, the show would still be playing."

"I thought you said it wasn't my fault."

"I did say that and I meant it."

They sat staring at each other, their lightheartedness suddenly becoming serious, and the air grew heavy around them.

"We had sex," Hermione said.

"We did," Draco replied.

"It wasn't very good."

Draco snorted. "Far from it."

"It... *ah*... does get better, right?"

Draco reached for her hand, linking their fingers, and smiled. "I promise. That was just a minor slip up."

"Good, because I'd hate to have to dump you for being a rubbish shag." She grinned at his look of incredulity, then twisted her lips into a nervous smile. "I can't believe we did that. Us."

"Us." Draco looked down at their joined hands, then back up. "You know, that's something we've not talked about. Us."

"Are you joking? That's *all* we've talked about."

"No, it's not. We've talked about us as Alphas and all that entails, but not about us just being *us*. You and me. Granger and Malfoy. Hermione and Draco."

"How is it any different?"

"It's vastly different." Draco frowned thoughtfully. "My behaviour towards you was despicable. How you've managed to get past it and are now sitting here with me is a complete mystery."

"So, you are wondering if it is just the Alpha attraction?"

"No, not at all. I know it's more than that, for me at least." He shifted closer to her, sliding under her legs so her thighs rested on his. Smiling, he tucked a lock of her hair behind her ear. "You surprise me constantly, Granger. You are so incredibly forgiving, even to those who don't deserve it. I mean, you're best friends with my mother, for Merlin's sake."

She smiled back, lifting their joined hands and kissing his knuckles. "I wasn't terribly happy that Molly took me to the Manor when she first suspected what was happening to me. And

your mother was on the receiving end of a rather rude tirade, so I wasn't all that forgiving."

"Was that when things changed for you?"

"At the Manor?" Draco nodded and Hermione shook her head. "No, it was quite a while before that. Harry and Ron kind of made it impossible not to forgive you lot. And what would be the point of holding onto that anger? I'm certainly not the same person I was back then, and I know you're not either."

Draco shrugged. "No, I guess I'm not."

"Draco, there's no *guessing*. You've changed more than any of us."

"Everything I saw and did... that's what changed me. I couldn't understand how people who celebrated blood purity could be so cruel." He shook his head. "Every idea I once held as truth... you came along and knocked each one of them down. But the most amazing thing is, my cruelty never changed you. You rarely showed any emotion when I degraded you. I mean, the reason you punched me was because I insulted Hagrid, not you."

"And I still stand by my actions," Hermione stated. "You deserved it."

"I did deserve it." He ran his knuckles down her cheek. "But I promise that snotty brat no longer exists."

"Other than that time you discovered I was an Alpha?" An impish grin broke out on her face and he poked her ribs.

"Other than that one time," he agreed, cupping her jaw and brushing his thumb across her cheek. "As for the rest of it, I'm not sure I could ever apologise enough."

"Draco, let's not dwell on it. What happened in the past needs to stay there. I know how you were then, and I know how you are now." She turned into his touch, closing her eyes for a second, then smiled at him. "And I like now."

"So do I." Draco's free hand resumed caressing her calf. "So, what do we do now?"

Hermione lay her head on the back of the sofa. "What do you mean?"

"Tomorrow. The day after. The one after that. Next week. What is it you're thinking about us?"

"Do you remember what I told you while we were dancing at the wedding?"

"The thing about our inevitable bonding?"

Hermione nodded. "I do want this with you, Draco, but we still have a long way to go before *that* takes place."

"Okay," Draco nodded slowly. "But in the meantime we... what? Hide away from the world until we're bonded?"

"No, not hide. Not anymore." She smiled at the expression of hope on his face. "You said it yourself, people watch you regardless of the unwritten rules. They might not talk about you, but they watch. And as sweet as it was of you and Alexander, the interview will really not stop the chatter and the attention I've received. So-" she shifted from her position, moving slowly to straddle his lap. "-let them watch."

Draco's hands curled around her hips. "That's a big step. Are you sure you're ready?"

"I'm positive." Hermione wrapped her arms around his neck. "I want to be seen with you. I want all those women who thought they'd landed Draco Malfoy to know he's no longer available, that Hermione Granger is the only woman who even comes close to satisfying him."

Draco pulled her forward in his lap, allowing her to feel him stirring between her thighs. He reached up and tucked her hair over her shoulders. "There she is. There's the Alpha no one will ever fuck with."

Hermione pressed her nose to his throat. "You smell so fucking delicious." She latched onto his scent gland, her mouth sucking hard, tasting the salty-sweet flavour of his skin.

"Granger," he groaned, sliding his hands beneath her jumper, his fingers pressing close to her spine. When she looked up at him, his lips curved into a wicked grin and he raised an eyebrow.

"What colour?" she whispered.

"The most perfect shade of gold I've seen yet."

Her mouth came down over his, lips moved, tongues stroked and caressed, and Draco's hands curved around her ribs, sliding up to cup her breasts.

Hermione pulled away to look at him. His eyes were light, his arousal evident, the gentle caress of his hands drawing the fire of her own desire down to where he was pressed hard against her.

"Draco?" Her voice was little more than a breath of air.

"Hmm?"

"Did that show have an encore?"

Chapter End Notes

As always, a great big bunch of gratitude for reading and reviewing and favouriting this fic xx

Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"Block the floo."

Draco's voice was a deep growl as he wrapped her legs around him and stood. Hermione waved her hand in the direction of the fireplace, the flames roaring to life and closing it off. Her mouth barely left his neck while he strode towards the stairs, not slowing down as he took them two at a time.

He lowered her to the floor, kicking the bedroom door closed before shoving her against it and kissing her deeply. His hands threaded into her hair, turning her head to change the angle of his kiss, his tongue sweeping into her mouth. She let out a tiny moan, her hands clutching at his hoodie and fumbling with the zipper. Her moan turned into a growl of frustration when he grabbed her wrists and lifted her arms above her head.

"Slow down, Granger." Draco chuckled at her attempts to break his hold. "You asked for an encore, not a repeat performance."

She whined, still squirming against him. "Naked. I need you fucking naked. I want your cock inside me. I want you fucking—" She stopped, staring up at him, her entire face scarlet. "I've no idea where that came from."

Draco released his grip on her wrists, allowing her arms to drop to her sides. He cupped her jaw, stopping her from looking away. "I *will* be naked and I *will* be inside you. But I will *not* be fucking you."

"Why not?" she blurted causing him to laugh.

"Granger, you said it yourself; we had sex. And it wasn't good." Draco leaned closer, his mouth hovering over hers. "I plan to rectify that."

Hermione's gasped '*oh*' was stolen from the air as Draco's mouth took hers. His tongue slid slowly through her open lips, teasing, tasting, kissing her like he had wanted to for weeks.

He had wanted to take his time, to kiss her slowly, to learn what made her purr. But her being untouched had shut down all rational thought and spurred the Alpha in him. In that one moment, he had wanted her with a desperation that overwhelmed him, and he'd not been able to stop it.

He'd never felt this chemistry with anyone before. There was something about her — something other than the Alpha — that opened up a different side of him, a side he never knew existed. All other women had ceased to exist; now he only saw her. He wanted to be settled, wanted the life he had always considered dull, wanted to see her, smell her, hold her

every day. He wanted to make slow love to her, not just fuck her into oblivion and brag about it.

And he'd screwed that up.

But this time...

Draco broke their kiss, his hands remaining on her face as he smiled down at her. "If you'll let me, I'll show you how you deserve to be loved."

"Please," Hermione whispered, panting lightly, her eyes becoming lighter by the second.

"You'll never have to beg me for this. Never. I'll give you anything you ever ask for." Draco gripped the hem of her jumper, pushing it up her torso, gorgeously rumpling her hair as he tugged it over her head. He paused for a moment to cup her breasts gently, kissing her once more before dropping to his knees and slowly dragging her pyjamas down in a practiced movement. He tapped one ankle with his fingertips and she lifted her foot, kicking the clothing away.

Then he stopped still.

His eyes moved slowly up her body, drinking in every dip and curve, taking in the tiny scars and freckles. When his eyes finally met hers, she was staring down at him with apprehension.

Draco inhaled deeply through his nose, the spicy scent of her arousal filling his senses and causing his cock to throb with need. His heart picked up, his blood simmered in his veins and the urge to sink inside her, stay deep and claim her was almost too much. But he shoved the urge away. She deserved pleasure, needed to know just how desirable she was, needed to experience being dominated and worshipped at the same time.

"You are..." he paused, pressing a single kiss just below her belly button. "Fucking hell. I can barely look at you. You're perfect."

He began to kiss his way across her abdomen from one hip to the other, warm and wet, soft and unhurried, his tongue swirling. She was sweet, tasting like the honey he could always scent on her, and mixed with the hot, spicy scent of her arousal, it made for a heady combination.

Lifting her leg, he dragged it over his shoulder and turned his face to find the hidden sweet spot that was exclusive to female Alphas. She cried out, her hands gripping his hair when his lips sucked hard, pulling the soft skin of her thigh into his mouth.

"Draco... oh... *fuck!*" Hermione's cry was sharp and she clutched his hair tighter.

Draco grinned and sucked harder; these glands were obviously the most sensitive and he planned to make the most of it. "Does that feel good, Darling?"

"So... good..."

Her breathy response caused him to peer up at her. Her head had dropped back against the door, her eyes were closed, and her face held an expression of sheer bliss.

He'd barely started and she was almost ready to fall.

He returned to her thigh, teeth and tongue and lips working to drive her into a frenzy. And it didn't take long. She bucked against him, her muscles tensing, and she choked out his name.

Her leg buckled and Draco's lightning-quick hands stopped her from falling. He glanced up at her, smiling at the sight. She was staring down at him in a daze. Her eyes were glowing pure gold, her face was flushed, and her lips were parted as she breathed hard.

He lowered her leg gently from his shoulder, holding her steady before standing and kissing her. "That's one, Darling. How many more shall I give you?"

"I think I'm done." She gripped his arms and sank back against the door. "I can't feel my legs."

"You're not done," Draco laughed and quickly shed his hoodie, wanting to feel her skin against his. "Not by a long shot."

"Your mother was right, those glands are *very* sensitive."

Draco pulled away slightly, frowning down at her. "I'd prefer not to talk about my mother right now."

"But she's so wise, and the way she looks at your father makes me think—"

Draco cut her off, his mouth landing hard against hers — he didn't want any thoughts of his parents in his head. Only her. Only the soft, sweet scent of her, the feel of her skin, the sound of her cries of pleasure.

His hands began to move, cupping her breasts, his thumbs flicking back and forth over her tight nipples. Hermione moaned into his mouth, her muffled '*more*' had him sliding one hand lower, tickling along her ribs, her belly, before slipping between her thighs. She gasped, pulling away from his mouth, her fingers digging into his arms as he stroked her soft, bare skin.

"Hmm, I didn't ever imagine you being bare, Granger. You're full of surprises."

"You don't like it?"

"On the contrary." His fingers teased, stroking across her seam but never dipping inside. He lowered his head, whispering in her ear, "I'd love your sweet, little cunt any way you gave it to me."

She shivered at his words, a quiet moan escaping her when his thumb found her clit and pressed down against it.

"You did this to me," she murmured. "In my dream, you... touched me... like this."

"What else did you dream?"

"You... inside... fucking..."

The staccato of words was all she could manage and Draco smiled into her neck when he slipped his fingers lower, sweeping across her entrance, and she jerked against his hand.

"Did you touch yourself when you dreamed of me?" He sank the tip of one finger inside her. "Did you imagine your fingers were mine?"

"Yes," she breathed. "Always you."

Fuck.

Always you.

Her words were exactly the ones he wanted to hear.

"Did you come?" He added another finger, easing them both carefully inside.

"Yeah."

"Did you cry out my name?"

She nodded, letting out a loud moan when his thumb began to work her clit in tight circles.

"Are you melting, sweetheart? Are you going to gush all over my hand?" He took her earlobe between his teeth, biting down gently. "Will you watch me lick your orgasm from my fingers?"

She murmured an incoherent sound and he grinned, pumping his fingers hard and fast. Her body shook, her fingernails bit into his arms as she gasped out his name.

"Tell me. Say the words."

"I'm com—" She choked on the words, her hips bucked wildly, and she cried out.

Draco wrapped his free arm around her as she collapsed into him, shuddering. Her breath was hot against his chest and a tiny shiver ran through her when he gently dragged his fingers out of her. He pressed a kiss to the top of her head and asked, "Okay?"

"More than okay." She nodded, "So much better than my dreams."

"Glad to hear." He lifted her, carrying her across the room and lowering her to the bed. He winked at her and - as promised - he sucked his fingers into his mouth and cleaned her orgasm from them. "But, it's about to get even better."

Hermione leaned up on her elbows, watching him as he quickly shoved his sweats down his legs and kicked them aside. She bit her lip, her eyes drinking in his naked form, drinking in his thick, rigid shaft stretching out from his body.

"Don't get any ideas. I still have plans for you that don't include this just yet." He stroked himself from base to tip, squeezing the head tightly, and biting back his laugh at her shocked expression. "I know you've touched yourself, you just admitted it. Now, show me."

"Show you...?" Hermione finally glanced up at his face. "Show you what?"

Draco knelt on the bed between her feet and nodded towards her core. "Show me how you touch yourself when you dream of me."

"I... *uh*... you're... serious?" Hermione stammered.

Draco continued to slowly stroke himself. "I am deadly serious. Use your hands. Show me."

Draco watched her face, almost able to read her every thought. She was nervous. She'd never been with anyone, never had sex before today, and now he was asking her to touch herself for his pleasure. It was a mistake.

"Sorry, Darling, you don't—"

"Tell me how," she whispered. "Tell me what you want."

Draco stared at her. Sex between two Alphas was the stuff of imagined legend. Two dominant personalities fighting for the upper hand. But, instead of a long, drawn out battle to take control, she was giving herself willingly to him. He'd never imagined Hermione Granger submitting to anyone, least of all him, and he had to shove away the need to simply take her.

He touched the inside of her knee and pushed gently. "Spread your legs."

Hermione bit her lip and slowly opened her legs wider, her hand drifting to her navel.

"That's it, Darling. Don't be shy. Get your fingers wet and touch your clit."

She worried her lip between her teeth, still nervous, but she surprised him. Lifting her hand, she held out two fingers, "Help me?"

Draco leaned slowly forward, sucking her delicate fingers into his mouth, swirling his tongue, and biting down gently. She scrunched her nose in an adorable smile, then dragged her fingers away and reached between her thighs.

He watched in awe as her wet fingers landed on her clit, circling slowly.

"Like that?" she asked quietly, and Draco nodded.

"Keep it slow." He settled more comfortably between her legs, his hands spreading over the insides of her thighs, thumbs brushing over the sensitised glands. "How does it feel?"

"Good," she murmured. "So good."

"Do you like me watching you?"

She nodded. "Yeah."

"Show me more."

Draco kissed the back of her hand as she moved her fingers lower, spreading her legs even wider and pushing them inside her. She kept the pace slow, just as he'd asked, plunging in and out while the heel of her hand slid over her clit. Her other hand traveled to her breast, twisting and tugging at her nipple, and a tiny cry of pleasure escaped her.

Her hips began to rock, her fingers speeding up, moving back to rub at her swollen clit. Pressing and circling, her fingers moved faster, her breathing became heavier, and a series of moans and sharp cries filled the room.

It was a sight he'd never imagined. She was soft and wet, and her scent was spicy, yet clean and pure. It was an intoxicating aroma that caused his brain to fog and his hips to fuck into the mattress in time with her fingers.

"Fucking hell, Granger," Draco growled, the desperate need to taste her overtaking all other thoughts. He dipped his head low, his tongue darting out to plunge deep inside her sweetness. A heavy gasp ripped out of her lungs and her hand grabbed his hair.

"Fuck," he groaned glancing up at her surprised face. "You taste like heaven."

"That feels... *oh*, gods!" Her head dropped back to the pillow, his tongue sliding back inside her.

Together they worked her, his tongue licking, lips sucking, while her fingers circled furiously. He pressed his thumb into her thigh gland and her back arched sharply, a silent scream stuck in her throat. Her body shook and her thighs trembled but he didn't let up. Nudging her hand away, he closed his mouth over the tight bud, flicking it with his tongue.

She squirmed, digging her heels into the mattress trying to push herself away from the intensity of her third orgasm. But Draco held her to him, his mouth and tongue torturing her clit, two fingers sliding into her, pulsing quickly in and out, twisting and curling until she finally flew.

Her body clamped down hard on his fingers, her hips jerked against his mouth, and her wail was of pure pleasure as her body released. Draco glanced up and his stomach tightened. Her golden eyes were locked on his, her mouth open, her breath ragged and short. Her face was flushed, her hair a tangled mess, and sweat shone on her skin.

She was fucking beautiful.

He slowed his movements and withdrew his fingers, kissing each thigh gland before running his tongue up her body, flicking one nipple, then finding her mouth. His tongue slid slowly across her open lips allowing her to taste herself. She groaned, sucking it eagerly into her mouth.

Draco's arms circled her head, the heavy weight of his body pressed her into the mattress, and the harder he kissed her, the harder she kissed back. Her hands slid into his hair, her tongue sweeping into his mouth and pulling a low groan from him. He bit at her bottom lip, shifting his body to fit the solid length of his cock into the wet slip of skin his mouth had just enjoyed. She let out a tiny, incredibly sexy moan, her legs wrapping around his waist, her kisses suddenly hot, urgent, needy as her hips rocked against him, her wet heat sliding along his length.

"Are you ready?" Draco managed, his voice reedy, harsh, his teeth gritted at the feel of her.

"Yes... Draco, please... yes."

He lifted his body off her and reached between them, taking himself in hand. He teased the head of his cock over her clit, pulling another delicious moan from her.

She was exquisite beneath him, something he hadn't had the chance to enjoy just hours ago. Tanned skin, toned muscles, killer curves — she had a body to die for, and he would be more than willing to sacrifice himself. Her breasts were beautiful, round, and natural, unlike the magically enhanced ones he'd experienced. Her lush, pink nipples were tight, and a tiny freckle in the centre of her chest was just begging to be kissed.

And he did just that, leaning down slowly and touching his lips to the tiny fleck on her skin.

"Draco?"

"Yes, Darling?"

"Are you going to fuck me?"

"No." He moved over her, the head of his cock probing her entrance. "I'm going to love you," he pushed against her, "I'm going to show you how you should be treated," the very tip of him slipped inside her body, "how you should be worshipped." He thrust smoothly into her, her body stretching around him, her back arching, her breath catching. She was wet, warm and tight, her body squeezing him like a glove.

He leaned over her and his mouth returned to hers, kissing her deeply. Her arms curled around his shoulders, pulling him down to her, their warm skin caressing each other, and his mouth moved to her jaw, kissing his way to her ear.

"Okay?" he whispered and she nodded.

"So okay," she murmured. "You feel incredible."

"So do you." Draco smiled, lifting himself to his elbows and thrusting shallowly.

Hermione groaned, rolling her hips with him as his movements became a long slide in and out of her.

He kissed her neck, her shoulder, her chest, always returning to her mouth as if to reassure himself that this was real, that Granger was naked beneath him, her body accepting his, her

gentle touches, her quiet moans. And that it was all for him.

His thoughts scattered wildly in his mind; he knew he shouldn't be thinking of any other woman in this moment, but all of them paled in comparison to her. There had never been a real connection with anyone else; they had all simply been warm bodies to bury himself in at the end of the night.

But this...

This was what intimacy felt like — her wanting him, him wanting her — both giving and receiving the pleasure they desired.

She had given herself to him completely, had allowed him to touch and kiss and taste her without resistance. She'd opened up to him in more ways than just spreading her legs. She'd been honest to the point of being blunt, telling him her fears, how hard everything had been for her, how he hadn't made things any easier. Her harsh words had been what he had needed. Her honesty had cracked his shell, opened his heart, and made him want to be more open with her.

But he also wanted to look at her and be content in the knowledge that she was *his*. And as ready as she was to give herself to him as she was, she wasn't ready to be bonded to him for eternity. So, for now, he would satisfy himself with the tightest, wettest, most perfect pussy he had ever had the pleasure of fucking.

Draco curled his body over hers, her thighs sliding higher along his ribs, her mouth dropping open as the change in angle had him hitting the soft spot inside her that sent shocks of pleasure rippling around her body.

He found her hands and dragged them over her head, linking their fingers. She squeezed his hands tightly — her own reassurance that this was real — and gasped again when he changed his pace, driving into her, quick and sharp, his pelvis pounding hard against her clit.

"Gods Draco, I'm... won't last... coming..."

Her words were muffled against his neck, her mouth seeking the gland at his throat, licking and sucking, drawing the taste of him into her mouth. Her body bucked, her thighs gripping his ribs in a tight squeeze. Her head snapped back, the snug muscles surrounding him clenched and released, and a deep groan escaped her as her orgasm finally hit.

Draco slowed, riding her through her release, prolonging the pleasure to the very last second. He turned his mouth against her throat, sweeping his tongue across her salty skin and pressing kisses to the juncture of her shoulder.

Her hands pulled out of his grip and she slid her fingers through his damp hair, lifting his face to look at her. "Draco... you didn't..."

"This is far from over, Darling. I'm an Alpha, I can go all night." He nipped at her jaw then pulled out of her, ignoring her whine. Slapping her hip lightly, he told her, "Roll over. I need you on your stomach."

"I can't move, you've wrecked me."

Draco raised an eyebrow and smirked, his hand coming down to lightly spank her right on her clit.

Hermione jolted in surprise. "What the hell was that for?"

"Your insolence." He did it again, quickly dropping down to kiss the tender spot.

"Oh, shit... that's..." she moaned, clamping her thighs against his head as he began to feast on her again.

"I could fucking eat you all night." With a groan he pushed her legs apart and rose up on his knees. "But... I asked you to turn over."

He flipped her easily, spreading her legs with his knees and leaning over her. He slowly dragged his fingertips along the back of her thigh, over her arse, and finally dug them into her hip.

"You will have your chance, Granger, to be the dominant player, but right now..." He lifted her hips, settling his cock against her wet, waiting core. Leaning down, he whispered against the shell of her ear, "It's my turn."

He pushed into her slowly, letting her feel every solid inch of him. "Do you feel that, Granger? Do you feel your tight cunt swallowing me?"

"*Oh.*" The sound came out in a rush, as if he'd pushed the word out of her mouth when he reached the very end of her.

He kissed along her shoulder, up her neck to her ear. "Do you like this, Darling? Do you like how deep I am?"

She nodded, her body shivering at the scrape of his teeth across her skin.

"You look amazing like this. You make it hard to hold back." He lifted off her and started to move, small, sharp stabs of his hips pushing her up the mattress. Her hands fisted the sheets, her face pressed into the pillow, and her hips rocked back, pressing her arse against his thighs. "Look at you, Granger. Fuck! You're fucking incredible."

He watched where he moved in her, pushing deeper and deeper with each thrust, his cock wet, covered with her as it slid in and out. The sight was almost too much. His stomach tightened and he growled at the feel of her walls fluttering around him. She was close, her pussy overly sensitive and already beginning to spasm.

He slid his hands beneath her, pulling her up, her back pressed flush against his chest. He wrapped one arm around her ribs, cupping her breast in one hand, his other dropping down to her navel, holding her to him as he plunged into her.

He felt the soft folds of her pussy brushing against his thick knot and he wondered if it was the same feeling she experienced when he touched her clit. The buzz of sensation with each

touch rocketed through him, the sensitive knot aching, his balls pulling up tightly.

His own groans grew louder, his breaths heavy and harsh as he shifted the angle and drove in deep. She wailed, her body curling and shuddering, and Draco knew at this angle, he was hitting the sensitive spot inside her with every thrust.

His hand dropped lower, finding her clit and circling fast. Her cries grew louder, tighter, until another mewling wail left her, her body bucking, her drenched core sucking him in even deeper.

Draco barely held on, fucking into her hard and fast. The pleasure built inside him, and for a few seconds, his entire body and mind went numb. It was a feeling like nothing he'd ever experienced — strangely helpless yet in total control. His body tightened and pure relief washed over him. He clutched her to him, groaning as his body released within her.

Her head dropped back to his shoulder and she shuddered, her body gripping him one last time before she relaxed against him.

"Oh," she breathed. "That was..."

Draco nuzzled her neck. "Yeah, it was." He was still thrusting slowly in and out of her, enjoying the feel of her, the soft warmth he didn't want to leave.

She tilted her head and he captured her mouth, just kissing her for the next minute. The flame was still there, but much quieter. Their kisses were slow and sweet, a gentle touching of mouths and shared breaths.

"You didn't knot in me," Hermione said. "I could feel it against me, but you didn't..."

He kissed her once more. "No, Darling, not this time. It won't happen every time." He traced his fingers along her cheekbone. "I wanted to enjoy you, wanted you to enjoy me. If I knot inside you, it'll be over too quickly."

"Oh," she breathed. "Quick isn't good."

"No, quick is definitely not good." Draco chuckled. "You're okay? Not too sore?"

Hermione shook her head. "No, I feel... that was... you were..."

Draco kissed the underside of her jaw. "I know. I'm a little overwhelmed myself."

"Draco?"

"Hmm," he hummed, still kissing her jaw.

"That was quite the encore."

He grinned into her neck, his fingers dipping between her legs again, "We could go again. Second encores are always a crowd pleaser."

"I don't think I can." She shifted, wincing at the movement. "Not right now."

"Granger," he scolded, his tone a deep growl. "I hurt you again—"

"No." She shook her head and touched his cheek. "I'm not hurt, just too sensitive."

He nodded, finally pulling out of her, his cock still throbbing and twitching, and he immediately reached between her thighs.

"Draco, what—"

"Shh," he hummed against her neck. "I'm not quite finished."

He slipped two fingers inside her, feeling his seed sliding out of her. Gathering some on his fingertips, he pulled his fingers out of her and spread his release over her thigh gland. He did the same again, gathering his seed and spreading it on her other thigh. He repeated his actions twice more, reaching between her thighs and spreading his scent over the glands at her throat. It was primal and archaic, but he didn't care. Any man who came near her would know she was taken by an Alpha.

Hermione sighed at his touch. "Are you marking me?"

"Absolutely I am. You're mine, Granger, and until we're bonded and there's no questions surrounding us, you'll be wearing me all over you."

Chapter End Notes

As always, I am so grateful to everyone who is reading this story. Your comments and kudos are much appreciated xx

Real life has gotten in the way once more, so I'll be taking a short break to deal with stuff and will be back in three weeks.

Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Hermione woke with Draco wrapped around her, every inch of him touching her. One arm was wrapped tightly around her waist holding her to him like a vice. The other stretched out beneath her, his bicep pillowing her head, his fingers linked with hers. His face pressed into her neck, his skin so incredibly warm against hers.

And he was hard — ready for her even in his unconscious state.

Hermione let out a tiny groan at the feel of him and he snuggled impossibly closer. *Draco Malfoy was a snuggler*. The thought made her giggle.

"Something funny?" His voice was thick, still half asleep.

"You're a snuggler." She flexed her torso, pressing her arse tighter against his heavy erection. "You're a clingy, needy snuggler. I know your secret now."

"It's all your fault. You're the perfect little spoon and you smell incredible." He thrust his hips gently, the thick length of him brushing her arse. He released his grip on her waist and lifted her leg over his, touching the soft skin on her inner thigh. His hand dipped lower, but she stopped him.

"It's Monday. We don't have time for that. We have to go to work."

Draco groaned. "Take the day off."

His hand continued its journey, his fingers sliding between her folds in a V shape. Hermione closed her eyes and groaned. She couldn't do this. Couldn't just fob off work for a day in bed with Draco Malfoy.

He kissed her neck and a shiver of pleasure rippled down her spine. *Oh, this was... No!*

Hermione slapped his hand away and rolled to her stomach. When she turned her head to look at him, he was grinning at her.

"That smile won't work on me, Malfoy." She sat up, glaring at him. "I have a shop to run and you're not going to distract me from that."

He reached out quickly, pulling her to him, and laughing at her indignant yelp.

"Draco! I said no!"

"I know you did. But you're going to lay here just a bit longer." He kissed her and rolled out of bed, and she couldn't stop her eyes from dropping below his waist. He ignored her ogling him and pulled the covers over her. "I'm going to shower, then I'll make you breakfast."

"You can make breakfast?"

"I can find a bowl and fill it with cereal. Maybe some milk." He winked at her and made his way towards the door. He paused, turning to face her, his hand circling his erection. "Unless, that is, you want to join me."

Hermione watched his hand slide along his considerable length, swallowing hard, and picturing another shower with him.

"No," she finally managed, pushing away all the naked, wet images of him. "That's not the most constructive plan when both of us have to go to work."

"You don't trust yourself with me? It's just a shower. What could possibly happen?"

"I'm very trustworthy." Hermione pulled the covers over herself and snuggled into the warmth his body had left behind. "You're the issue."

Draco shrugged one shoulder. "Your loss, Granger."

"Go and shower." She tossed a pillow at him, hitting him on the arse as he turned away, smiling at his chuckle as he retreated down the hallway.

She sighed and buried her face into the pillow. His scent was everywhere, strong and masculine, musky, like he'd spent the night drawing an obscene amount of pleasure from her.

Hermione felt her cheeks heat up at the thought and closed her eyes.

She'd had sex.

Sex.

Sex with Draco Malfoy.

Good sex.

She giggled softly.

The sex wasn't that good.

He'd not even been pissed at her for blurting those words out. Her first experience had *not* been good, but he'd more than made up for it. He'd been incredible, focused on her pleasure not his. Focused on making it good for her — not exactly treating her with kid gloves, but gentle and caring. Nothing like the wild Alpha sex she'd read about.

And his... well, she was still astounded that he fit inside her.

Maybe my vagina is magical.

The thought came out of nowhere and she snorted a laugh.

My magical vagina that can accommodate an anaconda-sized penis.

None of the books had mentioned Magical vaginas and anaconda-sized penises.

Draco Malfoy and his South American snake. Hermione Granger and her slick Amazonian inlet for it to reside.

She pressed her face into the pillow to stifle her laughter. *What was this ridiculousness she had fallen into?*

A quiet groan sounded from the hallway and she lifted her head, half expecting him to be standing in the doorway, looking at her like the immature fool she was being. But the doorway was empty.

Another low groan sounded, followed by a grunt of her name. Hermione's hand flew to her mouth.

Was he...?

Her Alpha hearing kicked in and she could hear the shower, the splash of water drops as they made contact with the tiles. His groans and grunts, soft and quiet, caused her to bite her lip and wonder what he looked like as he stood naked under the water.

She slipped quietly out of the bed, picking up his discarded hoodie and shrugging into it as she tiptoed down the hall. Stifling another giggle, she realised why she could hear him so clearly: he'd left the bathroom door open.

Sneaking along the wall, she stopped just outside the doorway, closing her eyes and focusing her attention on the sound of him pleasuring himself. She was well aware that she would be more than welcome to simply join him under the water and watch close up. But this — listening without him knowing — was somehow more erotic.

Short breaths coming out in tight gasps.

The sound of his hand moving in a fast, steady rhythm.

Low grunts, interspersed with quiet groans of her name.

And then he was coming.

A long, deep moan. A quiet curse. A low chuckle.

Chuckle?

"Did you enjoy that, Darling?"

"What—" Hermione choked. "Ah, I mean... how did you know I was here?"

"I can smell you."

Hermione peered around the doorframe to find him grinning at her from behind the clear glass of the shower door.

"Why didn't you just join me, Granger?"

"Because it was more fun listening to you."

Draco ducked his head out of the water and drew in a deep breath through his nose. A smug expression curled his features. "I can scent how much fun it was for you."

She rolled her eyes, but he had a point; it had been *fun* for her. The undeniable heat between her thighs was making it hard not to take him up on his idea of a day off work spent in bed.

And the way he was staring at her through the glass told her he knew what she was thinking.

Sod it, she thought and stripped off the hoodie before joining him in the shower.

He shifted to one side, allowing the warm water to wash over her, and leaned down to kiss her before she could regret her decision.

"Good morning."

"Apparently it was a *very* good morning for you." She smiled cheekily and glanced down, gasping in shock to find he was still as hard as steel.

"I'm an Alpha," he reminded her as he palmed himself.

"Yeah, but..."

"But...?"

"Nothing, it's just... it's one more thing I didn't know."

He laughed and kissed her again. "Maybe you need to write your own book. Set the records straight."

"Hmm," Hermione hummed thoughtfully, reaching her hand towards him and wrapping her fingers around him. "Maybe."

"You'd have first-hand knowledge."

She giggled and leaned in, pressing a kiss to his chest, smiling at his quiet growl. Her hand began to move over him, squeezing him gently on the upstroke.

"That's it," he whispered. "Just a little tighter, Darling."

Squeezing him tighter, she kissed her way down his chest, loving the taste of his skin, the feel of him in her hand, the sounds he made. She bent her knees, her lips continuing their descent, until a ridiculous thought wormed its way into her head. Stopping abruptly, she pulled her hand away from him.

"Sorry... I didn't mean... we have to work..." She reached around him grabbing the soap from the dish, but he stopped her, touching her shoulder lightly.

"What just happened?" he asked. "Where'd you go?"

Hermione turned her back to him, "Nowhere. I just didn't want to start anything. We both have to get to work."

"Granger, whatever it is in your head right now, just tell me. I don't care how bad it is, just get it out."

"It's stupid." She closed her eyes and took several deep breaths, focusing on the sound of the water, on his breathing, on the steam rising around them. "I wanted to... I wondered how many other women had put their mouths on you."

There was silence for what seemed like an age, but when he finally spoke it was in a gentle tone. "Granger, turn around and look at me."

Hermione took another deep breath then turned to face him. She slowly lifted her eyes, finally landing on his.

"Ask me again," he said quietly. "Ask me all the things you want to know. Leave nothing out."

"How many women have there been?"

"Not as many as you think." He took the soap from her hand and placed it back in the dish. Taking both her hands in his, he lifted them to his lips, kissing her fingers. "There *have* been others, I won't deny that — can't deny that since you've seen the evidence. But most of the women I was photographed with rarely made it further than dinner or drinks."

"Most of them?"

Draco nodded. "Most of them. Yes, some of them made it to my bed, or me to theirs. I've had sex with several different women, I don't know the exact number, but it's not the hundreds the press would have you believe." He paused and smiled, her face asking the question her voice wouldn't. "Maybe a dozen. Fifteen at most. I'm not sorry, not for living my life. But I am sorry for the repercussions my actions might now cause."

"I'm not worried about repercussions," Hermione told him. "I mean, it's slightly concerning, but I'm sure I can handle any women who might come near you."

"So, what are you worried about?"

She felt her cheeks heat up, but she shoved the embarrassment away. She was naked in a shower with him, for Circe's sake, and she knew he wouldn't judge her.

"I don't know how to do any of this. You've been with women who know... things. I know nothing."

"Know things?" He frowned. "What things—*oh*. I don't care about that."

"But I do. You've been with all these women who have so much more experience, and I'm just an idiot who waited. I mean, I wanted to put my mouth on you just now and chickened out because I told myself I'd do it wrong. And last night? You had to tell me how to masturbate... like I've never done it before. I'm sure these women have touched you and kissed you and fucked you in all different ways and I know nothing, Draco. *Nothing*. And I know that you'll be sorry that you marked me—"

"Granger, take a breath." Draco cupped her face. "I don't care about any of that. Do you think I was a sex god the first time around?" She rolled her eyes and he laughed. "My first performance with you was slow compared to my very first time."

Hermione snorted a laugh. "Seriously? Because that was awfully quick."

"Seriously. It was all over before it really got started." He kissed her forehead. "So you don't have to worry about thinking you don't know anything—"

"But I *don't*."

"You don't have to worry, because whatever you want to do or try, I'll be a willing participant."

She shoved at his chest. "Of course you will. Can you be serious about this?"

"This *is* me being serious. Granger. Listen, whatever this is, wherever it's going, I'm all in. I don't care how inexperienced you think you are, last night was the best night of sex I've ever had."

"That's just an Alpha thing." Hermione dropped her gaze and shook her head.

"No, it definitely wasn't. And you're being ridiculous again." He stepped out of the shower and pulled a towel from the rack. He dried himself quickly and wrapped the towel around his waist. "When you're done in there, breakfast will be ready."

He strode down the hallway leaving Hermione to stare after him in his wake.

Hermione paused in her kitchen doorway, biting her lip. The sight before her was one that had not been in her dreams. Nor was it one she had ever imagined. She'd been prepared to come downstairs and rant at him for walking away from her like he did, but all those thoughts left her in a whooshing rush now that he was standing before her.

He was impeccable. Charcoal trousers with a matching double breasted waistcoat, grey shirt — just a few shades lighter than the charcoal — with the sleeves rolled up, and a black tie. He was sipping his tea and slowly perusing the newspaper.

Her entire underwear collection would be ruined if he looked like this every morning.

"I lied," he said without looking up. "I can't cook and you don't have any cereal. I can make tea though."

Hermione crossed the room to stand beside him, pouring her own cup. "Hannah brings me breakfast every morning. She worries that I forget to eat."

He nodded his head, still not looking at her. Hermione turned to face him, leaning her hip on the edge of the counter.

"Do I need to apologise?"

"No." He flipped the page and continued reading.

"Do you need to apologise?"

"Nope."

"Is this going to happen every time I don't know something? You're going to get pissy and storm off?"

He finally looked up at her. "I *didn't* get pissy, and you *do* know what's going on."

"Draco, I don't—"

He held his hand up, stopping her. "You tore my shirt off me. You Apparated us upstairs. You said some completely filthy words to me. *And* you were going to ride me into oblivion. Or have you forgotten that already?"

Hermione's lips moved but no sound came out. He was right; she had done those things.

"You know more than you think." He sipped his tea, peering over the cup as he did so. "But you got all embarrassed and backed off. So, I think maybe you're scared to give in to something you can't learn from a book. Something you can only feel."

"That's not..." she trailed off. *Damn him!* He was right again.

He placed his cup on the counter and turned to face her. "Are you ready to listen now?" She nodded and he continued, "You said your virginity wasn't a big deal. Well, neither is your inexperience. I see constant glimpses of the confident, intelligent, self-assured girl who bested me at school, but those glimpses are completely overshadowed by the woman who is too scared to act on instinct. You don't have to know everything, you don't have to do things properly or how a book tells you. This is something you have to learn by touching and feeling, tasting, and by doing all those things you want to, but your head is telling you not to."

She tugged on the small chain that joined the top two buttons on his waistcoat, "You're very wise for someone so pretty."

Draco laughed and looped an arm around her waist, pulling her closer. "Granger, please don't feel stupid or inadequate or embarrassed about any of this. And I was serious when I said I

will be a willing participant. Anything you want to do or try, please tell me. I may have had some experience, but this dual Alpha thing is all new for me as well."

"Did you expect more from me?" Hermione asked cautiously. "Did you think I'd be more like those women?"

"I'm not sure what I was expecting," Draco replied. "Although I certainly wasn't expecting to be your first."

"And only, most likely."

"Most likely?" Draco raised an eyebrow at her and she saw the muscle in his cheek twitch. "*Most likely?*"

"Does that scare you?"

"Does it scare me that you will eventually realise how much power you have and walk away from me because I was the world's biggest arsehole to you?"

"Yeah, that." Hermione grinned.

"It terrifies me."

Hermione's grin faltered. "Terrifies you? Why? We were nothing to each other a few months ago."

"I know. But everything has changed. All those things that did terrify me — commitment, one woman, being tied down to a family — are the things I now want. And you disappearing into the sunset with someone else... I don't even want to think about it."

"Draco," Hermione whispered and pressed her palm over his heart. The anguish on his face tore at her heart. While she'd been dealing with a myriad of emotions, so had he and she hadn't even realised. She didn't think *anyone* had realised. "You don't have to think about it. I'm not going anywhere. I promise."

"Now *I'm* being ridiculous."

"No you're not," Hermione assured him. "I've been so crazy emotional with all of this I've not thought you might be dealing with the same. So tell me."

He flicked her hair over her shoulder and traced his finger over her scent gland, and she could see the thoughts rolling around in his head.

"I was taught to hate you," he finally said. "My entire life I was told your kind were worthless and should be kept out of the magical community. That all changed with the war, of course, but I never really thought of you as much more than Pansy's new friend."

"Pansy and Harry, and Ron and Daph kind of threw us all together."

"Yeah. And in all honesty, I didn't think I'd see you more than the handful of times that I did." He smiled nervously at her. "I wasn't attracted to you in the slightest. Not sexually, in any case. I loved that you could hold your own with me, and I could at least have a decent conversation with you, but that was it."

"Don't worry," she laughed. "I didn't think much more of you and hoped to see you even less."

"So, is it just the Alpha side that's brought us together? Are we doomed here?"

Hermione shook her head. "I don't think we're doomed, and maybe in the beginning it was the Alpha side, but why should it matter? I've never felt an attraction to anyone else like I do with you."

Draco pressed a gentle kiss to her mouth. "I feel the same way about you."

"You said you're all in, Draco, well so am I."

"Good." He kissed her again. "Tonight we'll meet at mine and we can begin the bonding ritual."

Hermione choked. "Wha... What?"

"Kidding, Granger," Draco laughed. "But you will meet me at mine tonight and I'll take you to dinner. The world wasn't ready for Hermione Granger, Alpha, so they certainly won't be prepared for Hermione Granger and Draco Malfoy, Alpha pair."

A quiet knock sounded on her office door. Hermione glanced at the clock, it was just after one and she wasn't expecting anyone. Draco had told her he wouldn't be joining her for lunch; he had a meeting that he couldn't reschedule. And she had told him that she didn't expect him to meet her everyday.

Hannah wasn't prone to knocking. Although, the nervous way in which she'd greeted Hermione that morning may have changed that. Hermione had forgotten that it had been less than twenty-four hours since her hissy fit at brunch, and Hannah was the first of her friends she'd seen since.

Hermione had apologised, but Hannah had waved it away, telling her they had all been at fault for pushing her too far. They'd gone back and forth, finally settling on forgetting about it and moving on. But maybe Hannah was still hesitant.

"Come in," Hermione called and was surprised to see Pansy behind the door.

"Hi."

The single word was another surprise. Pansy sounded nervous, and Pansy was never nervous.

"Is everything okay?"

"*Ah*, yeah." Pansy winced. "Maybe not."

"Pansy, what's happened?" Hermione stood, a rush of panic hitting her. "Is Harry okay?"

"He's fine." She nodded at the chair in front of Hermione's desk. "Can we talk?"

Hermione sat down, smiling at Pansy who remained standing.

"Pans, will you sit down and tell me what's going on?"

"I wanted to apologise," Pansy began. "Sometimes I don't know when to shut up."

"*Sometimes*?" Hermione teased and Pansy finally sat down.

"Yeah, sometimes." Pansy sighed, running her fingernail along the arm of the chair. "Granger, can I be honest with you?" Hermione nodded and Pansy bit her lip. "I kind of hate you right now."

"Hate me?" Hermione was taken aback. "Did I do something?"

"No," Pansy assured her. "It's all me."

"Pansy—"

"I don't hate-hate you Granger, I just hate who you are. *What* you are."

Hermione frowned. "Pansy, I don't understand."

"You're an Alpha." Pansy dropped her eyes. "You're not just Granger anymore. You're *Granger*."

"Pansy, you're not making any sense."

"You've always been special. You're smart, you're talented. You saved the world. And now you're this."

"I had no control over this. I didn't—"

"I know, but can you please just let me say this?" Pansy held up her hand and Hermione nodded. "Granger, every room you walk into... everyone notices you. They always have. You're the Golden Girl. The Brightest Witch. You're everything everyone wants to be. I'm sure there are young girls at Hogwarts who have deliberately frizzed their hair to be just like yours. Everyone loves you. You never have to justify yourself to anyone."

"Pansy..."

"I'm married to Harry Potter and I still get looked at like I'm the enemy." She shook her head and huffed out a rueful laugh. "But I guess I deserve it. And I guess it's why I'm loud and thoughtless. I give people what they expect and take all the attention away from everyone else. Typical Pansy Parkinson. But now you're the Alpha, and the attention is even more on you than it was before, and..." she dropped her gaze to her lap "...I guess I'm a little bit jealous. Again."

"Jealous? Pansy, no. There's no reason at all for you to be jealous. You know I hate attention and I'm glad you're around to take it away from me. And those people who look at you like that, they don't know you at all." Hermione smiled. "Or they're just jealous that you landed Harry Potter."

Pansy laughed, "Maybe, but I'm sorry I was acting like a child yesterday at brunch. It's not my business what's happening between you and Draco. And I should have been more sensitive with everything you're dealing with. So, I'm sorry."

Hermione twisted her lips thoughtfully; this was a Pansy Parkinson she'd never seen. Never thought she'd see.

"Pans, I had a fit at you not because you were being your usual self. I had a fit because..." Hermione sighed. Hannah hadn't given up her secret and Hermione had no reason to think Pansy would either. "Pansy, the joke you made about Draco and I just talking, well, it wasn't a joke. It was all we'd been doing, and it was all me. I didn't want to rush into anything because... I hadn't rushed into anything before. With anyone. Ever."

Pansy stared at her, and Hermione could see her words slowly registering in Pansy's mind. She held back a laugh as Pansy's eyes grew wide and her jaw dropped open.

"Yeah." Hermione nodded in response to her friend's expression. "Shocking, right?"

"Ah... no. Not at all." Pansy winced at her own words. "I mean, yes. I mean..."

Hermione laughed, "Pansy Parkinson. speechless once more."

"It's just that... you've been out with guys before now, I just assumed..." Pansy shook her head, disgusted at herself. "Here I am being jealous of you now being the Alpha in the group and you've been dealing with more shit than I realised. I'm so sorry, Hermione. I shouldn't have teased you."

"It wasn't anything different than usual, I just let my emotions take over." Hermione shrugged. "It was a sensitive topic, one I didn't want to rush into."

Pansy nodded then grinned. "*Was* a sensitive subject?"

Hermione bit her lip but her own smile escaped. "Yes. *Was*."

"So, between your tantrum at brunch and now you've—" she paused. "Sorry. I'm doing it again."

"Actually, it's fine." Hermione assured her. "You might be of... assistance."

Pansy frowned. "Assistance? Was the Alpha sex rubbish?"

"No... yes. The first time..." Hermione began to laugh.

"It was funny?" Pansy was looking at her with an expression of utter disbelief. "What happened?"

"It was... unexpected." Hermione leaned back in her chair and sighed. "It was all going swimmingly, and then Draco discovered I was a virgin and it was all over in about half a minute."

Pansy goggled at her then snorted a laugh. "Sex god Alpha Draco Malfoy lasted half a minute?"

Hermione nodded and joined in the laughter. "It was awful, Pans. For both of us."

"I can imagine. Do you know why it happened?"

"Apparently Alpha males go all... Alpha-y when faced with a virgin. Their instincts take over and all they want is to plant their seed. There was no finesse and certainly no sex god."

"Oh, shit. That *sounds* awful." Pansy tilted her head to the side and looked sympathetic. "Maybe Draco should be here for some advice as well."

"Oh, no. We, *ah*... he more than made up for it."

"So what's the problem then?"

"I'm new to all of this and I've no idea what I'm doing. And with no offence meant, you do."

"No offence taken," Pansy laughed. "Granger, guys are easy. You just need to give their dicks some attention and they're happy."

"I don't imagine it's that easy," Hermione said sceptically.

"Oh, it is. And I would imagine it would be even easier for you."

"How so?"

"Alpha males have knots, am I right?" Hermione nodded and Pansy continued. "So I would imagine that would be as sensitive as all hell. Use it to your advantage."

"That's just it, Pansy. I really don't know how."

Pansy leaned forward, resting her elbows on the desk, and grinned. "Well then, Granger, get your quill out. You're about to be schooled in just how easy men are."

I'm so sorry about the extra week its taken, but my life - like everyone else's - has been turned upside down. I'll try to keep this to a schedule again, but with things as they are on my side, it might be fortnightly rather than weekly.

Thanks for sticking with me on this. I promise I'm doing my best to keep writing xx

Chapter 20

Hermione stared at her reflection, unsure what to think. Her chat with Pansy had been educational, to say the least, but the suggestion to dress down to the skin for her date with Draco was something she was even less accustomed to. Yes, she'd been wearing the lingerie that Pansy had insisted she buy, but she'd stuck with the tamer styles.

But this set...

This was the set she'd originally said no to. But Pansy had refused to allow her to leave the shop without it. It had been hidden in her drawer for weeks, and Hermione's plan was to never wear it. The Cornflower blue lace thong covered very little, and the matching bra may as well have been left in the drawer since it was little more than decoration. It was very pretty, but completely impractical.

But that was the point, Pansy had explained. It hadn't been made for practicality; it was merely to tease the men of the world. And the less coverage, the more effective the results.

Hermione had tried to counter Pansy's argument, telling her she didn't think Draco needed any encouragement; his performance — his encore — had been spectacular. The lace, or lack thereof, she was now wearing would have little effect on him.

Pansy had simply laughed, demanding she do as she was told and wear the damned underwear. She'd also insisted Hermione put on her black wrap dress since it was easier to reveal the surprise underneath.

Hermione sighed. There was nothing to be concerned about, she told herself. He'd already seen her naked, had seen more of her than anyone ever had. This was nothing. This was just pretty lace covering the bits he'd already seen. She could do this — wear this — and Draco would be stunned.

"Imagine his face, Hermione," she said to her reflection. "Imagine how good you'll feel when you show him what you've learned."

What she'd learned...

**** HG/DM ****

"Guys are easy," Pansy repeated. "Alpha or not. And you are in a very unique position."

"How so?" Hermione was beginning to regret asking Pansy. The expression of deviant delight on her face was a little concerning.

"You're an Alpha." Pansy tapped the desk. "You're in charge."

"In charge? Maybe I need to remind you of my situation."

"Granger, you just said Draco more than made up for his first performance. Did you not notice anything he particularly liked?"

Hermione's face heated up. "No, actually I didn't. I was too busy trying to keep myself from imploding."

"Well done, Draco," Pansy laughed. "Granger, listen. What exactly was he doing when he came?"

Hermione's face flamed and she lowered her eyes. "Pansy..."

"Hey, you wanted to talk about this. So talk."

"I just wanted some suggestions of what I *could* do, not talk about what we've already done."

Pansy shifted her chair forward and leaned her forearms on the desk. "Hermione, I'm not sure how many times I have to say it, but guys *are* easy. Give their dicks some attention and they're happy. But, if you want to really make him bow at your feet, you need to learn what he likes and push him to his limits. That's what he did with you."

Hermione frowned. "How did he know what I liked? I didn't even know."

"And that's why I asked what he was doing." Pansy pulled her wand from the inside of her jacket and silenced the room. "What you tell me stays in this room. You have my word on that. And there's no judgment here. Tell me what happened."

"The first time?" Hermione asked and Pansy nodded. "The first time he was... actually, we had a fight."

"Alpha sex includes fighting?"

"No, I don't mean a fist fight." Hermione laughed. "He called me out for being so pathetic. I was upset about what had happened at brunch, and he told me I was being ridiculous. That I was afraid to be myself."

"I have to agree with him there. You've been a little... off... lately," Pansy said. "And that led to angry Alpha sex?"

"No, that led to me ripping his shirt off."

Pansy's eyes grew wide and she held her palms up. "*Ah*, if you're ripping his shirt off, why are we having this conversation?"

"Well, it was all going along fine. He let me control things, but then my virginity caused—"

"Draco to fire early?" Pansy chuckled.

"Yeah." Hermione grinned. "Like I said, it was awful."

"Okay, so how did he make up for it?"

"He was..." Hermione sighed and bit her lip. "He was incredible."

"I can see that." Pansy smiled. "Was it one particular thing he did, or just everything?"

"Everything... but... I guess some facts about Alphas might help." She paused. She'd never really talked with Pansy like this. Never really talked with any of her friends about such things. Her conversation with Hannah had been the most she'd ever shared with anyone. Her friends had never been shy when it came to talking about this part of their lives, but she'd never felt comfortable discussing it. She'd never joined in — how could she? — just listened, laughing and cringing when it seemed appropriate. And her one time — albeit beyond any of her wildest imaginings — didn't qualify her as an expert. Far from it.

But Pansy wasn't being judgmental or her usual crude self. She was listening and laughing and making her feel comfortable.

"Pans, those rumours about Alpha males. The ones regarding their, *um*... size." Hermione waited for a smart comment, but Pansy remained silent. "Those rumours are true."

"Big?" Pansy arched one eyebrow.

"*Huge*," Hermione corrected.

"And you were okay the first time?"

Hermione nodded. "Surprisingly so."

"Is that a female Alpha thing? Being *accommodating*, I mean?"

"I'm not sure," Hermione said as she absently ran her finger along the blotter on her desk. "There's nothing to read when it comes to this. There's near nothing known about female Alphas."

"Okay, so it *might* be an Alpha thing." Pansy began to nod slowly. "And other than the speed of things the first time, it wasn't a painful experience. So the second time, what did you like about it?"

"I liked when he touched me. And I don't mean... *down there*." Hermione lowered her eyes and Pansy reached across the desk, touching her hand gently.

"Don't be embarrassed, Hermione. I know I'm an uncouth bitch most of the time, but not with something like this." She nodded her head in reassurance. "This is important to you — and sensitive — I'd never make jokes about it."

Hermione smiled her thanks. "I just mean, the way he touched me, he was gentle and he took his time. The way his hands felt on me, it was like..." she huffed out a laugh "...magic."

"I'm glad my boy has skills," Pansy said, then laughed at Hermione's expression. "You have Harry and Ron. I have Draco and Blaise. They've been my boys since we were children. And I'm glad Draco wasn't the domineering bastard I thought he'd be."

"He really wasn't... well, not really. I mean, with my skill level, he kind of had to take control."

"And — you don't have to go into great detail here — I'm assuming it was more than once?"

"It was. Another Alpha thing. Long, drawn out orgasms and a quick recovery time." Hermione's eyes went wide at her own words. "Sorry. That was too much sharing."

"Yeah, I'm back to jealous again," Pansy said with a grin. "So, you've discovered what you like... What about him?"

"I don't know, that's why I'm asking." Hermione pursed her lips. "And since you're with Harry, I don't need graphic details of what you two get up to."

"I think we have two completely different circumstances here. Draco is an Alpha. He's different than Harry will ever be."

"You said guys are easy though."

"And they are. But you have something different to work with." Pansy scrunched her face thoughtfully. "I have to share *one* thing with you so it makes sense, okay?" Hermione nodded and Pansy continued. "Harry likes it when I play with his balls. Either with my hands or my mouth. Drives him insane. It might work with Draco, but his knot might be even more sensitive."

"So I should... what?"

"Explore what happens. Start with just your fingers, gauge how sensitive it really is. And if he doesn't lose his load at that, try with... something else."

"You heard what I said, right? He's *huge*. He won't fit in my mouth." Hermione slapped her hand over her mouth as Pansy cracked up laughing.

"You don't have to put his whole dick in your mouth. Use your tongue, or your teeth. And while you're doing that, touch his balls, or if you really want to explore, a finger in the arse always goes down a treat."

Hermione winced at the picture that was suddenly in her head of Harry with Pansy's finger in... "You can't be serious. Straight guys wouldn't like that."

Pansy wiggled her eyebrows suggestively. "You might be surprised."

"So... *ah*... Harry likes that?"

"He does. He was hesitant at first, but since I let him... *ah*... well, you can imagine what I let him do, he caved and let me try it. And he said when my mouth is on him at the same time, it feels incredible."

"I'm not sure I'm ready for Draco to... *um*... do *that*."

"Oh, Merlin no!" Pansy was shaking her head. "*That's* not something Draco can just randomly do. You have to talk about that with him. And if you don't want him to, he needs to respect your choice."

"And what about him? Should I ask before I... shove my finger in his arse?"

Pansy snorted. "I would. He might be a bit shocked and half a minute might be reduced to ten seconds."

Hermione began to giggle. The thought of surprising Draco like that wasn't funny... but it really was. Her giggles turned into full-on laughter that she was unable to stop.

"This is insane!" she said between gasps and Pansy's own laughter joined hers. "I can't ever imagine Draco Malfoy enjoying *that*."

A knock at the door startled them both. Hermione wiped the tears from her eyes and flicked her hand towards the door, unlocking it and lifting the silencing charm at the same time.

"Hermione?"

"Come in, Hannah," she called, still trying to control her giggles.

Hannah stepped into the office. "Sorry to interrupt. Mrs Blackwell asked if you could find a book for her." She held up a piece of parchment and Hermione nodded.

"What is it?" Hermione asked, her breathing finally returning to normal.

"It's in Elvish." Hannah handed her the parchment.

"Shouldn't be an issue," she said and scribbled a quick note beneath Hannah's writing.

"Everything okay in here?" Hannah glanced between them.

"Yeah," Pansy said, another chuckle escaping her. "Hermione just had some questions."

"And Pansy had some interesting answers." Hermione snorted and laughter overtook her again.

Pansy looked at Hannah's confused expression. "You know, just finger up the bum stuff."

Hannah's eyes almost popped out. "Sorry, what?"

"Guys... what... they... like," Pansy spluttered.

"I'm... not... doing... that," Hermione gasped.

Hannah shook her head and, heading back out the door, she glanced over her shoulder and grinned. "Neville likes it."

Hermione almost choked and Pansy just laughed harder.

"See... I... told... you." Pansy wiped her face. "Guys are easy."

"No, I think you both just made it harder." Hermione hiccuped as her laughter subsided. "I'll be doing... stuff... and I'll think about this and laugh."

"Maybe, but that would make the conversation easier." Pansy let out a long breath, calming her giggles. "Granger, listen. You don't have to be perfect at all of this. You'll learn as you go. I know Draco, and I know he won't care."

"That's what he said."

"Then take him at his word. And honestly, if you're not sure if he likes what you're doing, ask him. I have no doubt he'll tell you."

"I've no doubt either," Hermione sighed. "I just want everything to be good for him. Like he was with me."

"And it will be." Pansy smiled at her. "You're a quick study, Granger. I have zero doubts that you'll have him bowing at your feet in no time."

**** HG/DM ****

Hermione smiled. Pansy was right. She had nothing to worry about. Draco had assured her he wasn't concerned with her lack of experience; he was more than willing to let her learn. Her confidence lifted as the tension drained from her body, and images of the previous night began playing like a movie inside her head.

"If you'll let me, I'll show you how you deserve to be loved."

"Does that feel good, Darling?"

"I'd love your sweet, little cunt any way you gave it to me."

"I'm going to love you... I'm going to show you how you should be treated... how you should be worshipped."

Turning from the mirror, she finished dressing, tying the sash on her wrap dress over her left hip, and loving the feel of the fabric against her bare skin. It hugged her curves without being

overly provocative — they were only meeting for dinner after all. She didn't need him to undress her before they even left the house.

She tamed her curls, leaving them loose and trailing down her back, and slipped on her heels before making her way downstairs.

Assuming he would be waiting, she headed into her living room, but found it empty — save for the vase filled to almost bursting with white daisies. *How did he know?*

A knock on the door startled her — *who the hell was...?*

She chuckled and went to open the door.

"Ms Granger." Draco was standing there with a single daisy in his hand. "You look amazing."

"What are you doing?" Hermione laughed and took the daisy when he held it out to her.

"I'm here to take you to dinner." He craned his neck back to look at the number on the bricks beside the door. "Or do I have the wrong house?"

"You were in my house an hour ago. In my bedroom, if I recall." She glanced over her shoulder and *Accio'd* her purse.

Their original plan to meet at his flat had been thrown aside when he showed up at the shop just as she was closing up. The grin on his face and look in his eyes told her they would be late — *very* late — for their dinner reservation.

Pansy's advice disappeared from her mind as Draco played her body like a fine instrument. Her skin tingled, her body shuddered, and she fell apart under his touch. He'd teased her after, telling her they should postpone dinner and stay in. But she'd refused. She'd made plans and didn't want them ruined.

So she'd sent him home, telling him to return and pick her up like a proper gentleman would. And he'd taken her words to heart, coming to the door rather than appearing out of the Floo.

"Ah, yes, your bedroom," Draco mused, leaning in to kiss her cheek. "It's fast becoming my favourite place."

"Yes, I'm noticing that." She stepped out of the house and locked the door. "And those clothes in my closet? Are they yours?"

Draco held his hand out, linking their fingers and squeezing gently. "Sorry, I should have asked. But I don't plan on spending any nights away from you."

Hermione ducked her head to hide her smile. "It's fine."

Draco touched her chin, bringing her face back to look at him. "Are you sure?"

"I am. But my place is much smaller than what you're used to. I'm not sure how much time you'll want to spend here."

He lifted her hand to his lips. "Without sounding like a sentimental fool, wherever you are is where I want to be."

She curled her hand around his hip and moved closer. "That was *very* sentimental and foolish, but I liked it."

He kissed her fingers once more, and she smiled at the pink tinge on his cheeks. "Yes, well, dinner. We best leave or we'll be late."

Hermione was still smiling when they reappeared from Apparating. Her big, strong Alpha had a hidden soft side. She was sure it was his Pureblood breeding. She'd seen how Lucius was with Narcissa, and Draco, it appeared, would be the same. The idea warmed her, and she slid her arm around him and hugged him tightly.

"*Fuck*." His voice was a harsh whisper, completely at odds with the sentimental side he'd just shown, and it startled her from her thoughts.

"What's wrong?"

"Theo and Gemma are here," he told her through gritted teeth, his eyes darkening as he glared over her shoulder.

"Ignore them."

"She'll love this." He snarled, his gaze still firmly planted on them. "We'll be headline news again tomorrow."

"I don't care, Draco." Hermione touched his cheek. "Hey, look at me."

Draco snarled one last time then dropped his gaze to hers. His eyes were darker than she'd ever seen them, his anger at his former schoolmate still bubbling beneath the surface.

"Ignore them," she repeated. "Let them look. Let her *think* she's just gotten another scoop."

Draco blinked at her words. "What?"

"Pansy's all over this." Hermione smiled at his surprise. "She's already written a piece about us and it's being printed as we speak. I hope that's okay?"

"*Ah*, yeah." Draco was shaking his head. "How did you... and Pansy... how?"

"We met earlier and talked about what happened at brunch," she told him. "And when we sorted that out, I asked if she would write something. I wanted her to be the one who got the story, especially after what Theo and Gemma did."

Draco cupped her face and kissed her. "You're brilliant."

She smiled up at him. "You're not mad?"

He shook his head. "Makes up for mine and Avery's interview."

"Well, this is possibly even bigger than that."

"Possibly," Draco chuckled.

"Mr Malfoy, Ms Granger?"

They both looked towards the voice and were met with the smiling host waiting to seat them. They followed him as he took them towards their table, Draco's hand gripping hers as they headed in Theo and Gemma's direction.

"Theo, Gemma, it's lovely to see you both." Hermione stopped beside their table, holding her hand up to the host in apology. "I hear things are going well between the two of you."

Theo was looking at Draco with an expression of fear and Gemma was unsuccessfully holding back a look of glee.

"Ah, yeah," Theo mumbled. "It's great."

"Glad to hear." Hermione leaned closer to Gemma and asked quietly, "Would you like a more recent picture of me? It might make your story look a bit more professional this time?"

Gemma's expression faltered.

"Draco and I *are* together. Two Alphas. The only time in history that it's been possible." Hermione tapped the table, a surge of magic surrounding the seated pair. "But the scoop isn't yours. And I've just bound you to secrecy. Anything you see or hear tonight just became sealed by an Unbreakable Vow. You really should have spent more time learning blocking spells." Hermione stood up straight, smiling sweetly. "And I do hope you enjoy working for the new owner of *The Prophet*."

Gemma's jaw dropped open. "Who...?"

"Oh, I'm sorry. Were you not aware?" Hermione glanced at Draco who was smirking.

"Father does enjoy new business ventures." He nodded towards the host. "Darling, we should leave Mr Nott and Ms Farley to their meal. It might be a while before they can afford such fine dining again."

Hermione smiled at the man politely waiting for them. "Sorry to keep you waiting. I abhor rudeness and disrespect, and here I am being both those things."

"I'm more than happy to wait for you, Ms Granger," he said with a wink. "Guests of your caliber are always given priority. If you will follow me?"

He held his hand out and they both followed him, leaving Theo and Gemma to stare after them.

"She's a spoiled cow," he muttered as he pulled a chair from the table in the back. "And he's nothing more than her lap dog."

Draco laughed, waiting for Hermione to sit before following suit. "You know them well, mate."

"They're here more often than not. Neither of them can cook apparently." He grinned then asked for their wine choice.

"Brunello di Montalcino," Draco told him and he nodded, telling them he would be right back.

"Are you stalking me, Mr Malfoy?" Hermione asked.

"I'm not sure what you mean."

"My favourite flowers, my favourite wine..."

"I might have had some help. Hannah is actually quite nice when she's not threatening me."

"I'm sorry, they're just a bit protective of me." She glanced at Theo and Gemma. "And you can understand why."

"Those two are my fault entirely," Draco said. "And unfortunately it's going to get worse, regardless of whether Pansy writes this story or not."

"I know. But we can at least control this one thing before all hell breaks loose. And I think those two will be more concerned with what Lucius might do at the newspaper rather than worrying about us." Hermione frowned. "Why didn't they know about your father buying The Prophet?"

"Father was going to announce it this week." Draco laughed when Hermione's face paled. "He won't care. He'll think it's perfect. He's never liked Theo, and his opinion of the Farleys isn't especially high either. And the fact Gemma can't announce it in the paper herself will please him to no end. All stories must now go through him."

"That's quite the workload to take on." Hermione smiled as a waiter arrived with their wine. He poured two glasses and then took their dinner orders.

"It'll only be for the first few weeks. He'll appoint a new editor as soon as he finds someone trustworthy. In his opinion it's turned into a trashy tabloid and Father wants to return The Prophet to the newspaper it once was."

"It won't stop the gossip about us though." Hermione rolled the stem of her wine glass in her fingers. "They've been relentless so far."

"Again, that's my fault. The media intrusion into my life wasn't really an intrusion. I welcomed it more often than not, which has become an unfortunate decision now. Especially considering you've been hounded."

"Not of late," Hermione told him. "I went all black witch on a bunch of people. It deterred them for a bit."

"I'd imagine it would have." Draco laughed.

"But this will be different. You and me. Two Alphas for the first time in history. That's going to be big news."

Draco shrugged. "Not if we ignore it."

"Is it that simple?"

"It is," Draco assured her. "I've been ignoring people my whole life. I'm an expert. I can teach you how."

"I think you've taught me enough in the last two days."

He reached across the table to still her fidgeting hand. "Granger. Hermione. We don't have to explain ourselves. We're not obligated to tell a story or put on a show for anyone. People can look at us all they want, or speculate, or gossip to their heart's content. None of it matters. There's only one thing that does matter and that one thing is what we want."

A giddy grin curled the edges of Hermione's mouth and she bit down on her lower lip to keep it from spilling over and making her giggle like a silly schoolgirl.

"Daisies, Brunello di Montalcino, a fancy restaurant, sweet words..." Her giddy grin slipped free. "Keep this up, Malfoy, and you might just get a surprise of your own."

The sight that met her when she returned from the ladies room pulled her up short. Her heart picked up as a rush of anger and fear hit her all at once.

Draco was waiting for her at the bar, but he wasn't alone. A tall blonde was standing beside him, her hand on his arm, a brilliant smile plastered on her face. She was gorgeous with shoulder-length, straight hair, just a shade darker than his.

He pulled away from her, but she reached for him again. His face held a strange expression — he was trying to be polite, trying not to make a scene, but she could sense his civility was being drowned by his anger.

Hermione watched for several moments before something inside her snapped. This woman was touching her mate. This woman's scent would be all over him.

The thought of him looking at another woman with the same intensity he looked at her with while he'd fucked her, the thought of him wanting — or even looking at — someone else at all, caused her stomach to knot in anger.

Hermione checked herself; he was clearly uncomfortable and this woman was too stupid to even notice. It wasn't his fault.

Unless...

Was this one of the women? One of those women he had been with before? Was she hoping he'd take her home?

Her heart was racing, the sound of her blood was pulsing in her ears. She had known this would happen eventually, but she wasn't prepared for it to happen so soon. And how often would it happen? How many of those other women would approach him when she wasn't around?

Her hands balled into fists and she could feel her anger surging. She closed her eyes, just trying to breathe, but that made it worse. Her sense of smell kicked in and, of course, all she could smell was *her*.

She didn't want him with anyone else, didn't want to even think about it. She was so focused on making him prove himself to her, she hadn't realised he could actually break her heart.

She calmed herself again and moved across the room towards them. Stopping beside Draco, she slid her hand around his back.

"Draco, are you ready to leave?"

He blinked at her in surprise — and horror — knowing he'd have some explaining to do.

"You?" The woman yanked her hand away from him. "You're Hermione Granger."

Hermione smiled, but even she knew it was fake. "I am. Do I know you?"

The woman shook her head. "No. You definitely don't. But you're... you're an... Alpha."

The last word was barely a whisper.

"Only recently, but yes. I'm an Alpha."

"Oh... oh, shit! I didn't know," she stammered.

"I did tell you," Draco said. "That I wasn't here alone."

The woman looked between them and her face grew deathly pale. "You're with... Alpha... oh shit... I'm sorry." She turned on her heel and fled, muttering something that sounded like Alpha mate.

"Granger, I'm so—"

"Are you ready to leave?" Hermione looked up at him, and she knew by the expression on his face that her eyes had darkened and he could tell she was furious.

He nodded and pressed his hand to the small of her back, indicating the door with his free hand. "I'm ready. And I am sorry."

"We'll talk about it at home."

He nodded again and led her out of the restaurant. But halfway to the Apparition point, he stopped.

"She approached me. I told her she—"

"We'll talk about this at home," Hermione repeated angrily.

"No. You'll listen to me now. I'll not discuss her in our home," Draco said firmly and pulled her into a nearby doorway. "*She* approached me. I told her I was there with you. Hermione Granger. But she just laughed and told me I was lying, that Hermione Granger was in hiding. I do know her, but not in the sense you're thinking. She's a friend of another woman I slept with, and I guess she saw an opportunity."

She huffed out a laugh. "An opportunity. If that's what you want to call it."

"Yes, that's exactly what it was for her." He held his hand up at her disbelieving look. "I'm not defending her, but I was alone at the bar. Yes, I was waiting for you, but I was alone. I'm sorry this happened so soon, but you said you weren't worried about the repercussions of my former life. But clearly you are."

She stared at him. "I'm not jealous."

He flicked her hair over her shoulder. "I think you are."

"Draco, I could smell her. I can *still* smell her. No men have been near me all day. Not since you... marked me. But I can smell her on you. And I don't like it."

He cupped her face in his hands and kissed her hard. "Then take me home and mark me."

Chapter 21

"You don't get to just kiss me and think everything is solved!" Hermione snapped the second they appeared in her bedroom. Draco had Apparated them mid-kiss and if his expression was any indication, he expected that they would have instantly gotten naked and rolled onto the bed.

She shoved him away. "So you think just because you say *you won't discuss it*, that's the end of it? That's not how this works, Draco!"

"Granger—"

"A woman was all over you. A woman who clearly knows you *and* your reputation. A woman who clearly knows how to please a man."

"This again?" Draco groaned in frustration. "We talked about this."

"No, *you* talked about this. You assured me everything is fine, you said *you* don't care. You. You, you, you!" She yelled and began pacing, the tension building between them in the room. She could feel the anger in him. Anger that she wouldn't just let this go. But she didn't care. "And now you need to listen to *me*. Are you capable of that?"

Draco shoved his hands in his pockets and nodded. His eyes had grown dark and she could see he was holding back

"All my life I've succeeded. In everything... well, almost everything. I can't fly a broom for shit. But because I've succeeded I..." She paused, closing her eyes and breathing deeply. "Because of that, I hate to fail. I've set the bar so high for myself it seems insane to everyone else, but I can't change that. I can't change who I am. And I won't. Not for you. Not for anyone. You've been with other women, Draco. A lot of other women, and I hate it. I hate that I'm not like them. That I've no idea what I'm doing here. I hate that I might fail at this. And instead of letting me rant and rave, you stomped away from me like a child this morning because you thought I was being ridiculous. And instead of slapping you like I should have done, I just agreed. I placated you, told you what was easiest to calm *you* down. It's something I have to stop doing." She stopped pacing and met his eyes. "I overthink things. I want — need — everything to be perfect. It's who I am. It's something you will have to learn to live with. Can you handle that?"

He slowly removed his hands from his pockets then crossed the room, leaning down until his face was just inches from hers.

"This is the woman I've been waiting for. The angry, forceful woman who knows what she wants. The one with the fire in her belly and ice in her veins. The one who will stand up and fight. That's the woman you are. That's the woman I want you to be. That's the woman I love."

He grabbed her face and kissed her, hard and angry, and with a want that she felt right to her core.

He wanted her like this. Wanted her angry, wanted her forceful. He—

The woman he loved?

She pulled away from him. "What?"

"You are Hermione Granger. That's who I want to be with. The woman I love."

"You don't love me."

"Actually, I do."

She backed away from him. "Draco, it's only been... a few weeks. You *can't* say that."

"It's been three months since our first encounter at the Manor." He smirked. "And too bad. I said it. Are you angry about it?"

"Yes I'm angry! Who the hell does that?"

"Me. It's who *I* am."

"So you've told every woman you've been with that you love them?"

"No." He moved closer to her once more. "I've only ever told one woman."

Hermione blinked at him. Her mouth dropped open in shock and her words failed her.

"I've never known anyone like you." He brushed the backs of his fingers across her cheek. "And as much as I was a bastard about it, you *are* Alpha. Everyone should have seen it. Smart, brave, fearless, incredibly selfless and kind. You are everything, Hermione Granger. And that's why I've fallen completely."

"But..."

"I've known all my life that when I found the woman I was meant to be with, I would say those words to her and only her. That's who *I* am. Can *you* handle that?"

She continued to stare at him, struggling to comprehend his words. She knew he was the one, knew it with her entire being. She felt deeply for him, felt the constant need to be near him. But love?

She wasn't quite sure what actually loving someone entailed. Was it simply the things she was feeling? Was it just the deep want to be with him? Was that all love was?

She gave her head a tiny shake. There had to be more. Love wasn't that simple.

"This is just Alpha bullshit, Draco. It's just your fucked up way of trying to calm me down." Hermione slammed her hands into his chest and he stumbled backward. "How many times do

I need to remind you? You're not the only Alpha in the room anymore."

A split second of shock flashed in his eyes, then a sneer curled his lip.

"Maybe you should remind me again. I mean, I'm just a stupid Alpha male. I'm only after one thing."

"Yeah, to be a fucking domineering arse." With a flick of her wrist his clothes vanished. "You need to be taught a lesson, Draco Malfoy."

"And what lesson could *you* possibly teach *me*?" he taunted, then gave a yelp of surprise when he slid backwards across the floorboards and landed heavily on the bed.

"A lesson, Mr Malfoy..." She moved to stand at the end of the bed, her fingers toying with the bow at her hip, pleased to note that he wasn't as unaffected as he wanted her to believe. "...that you will never, ever forget."

Her dress fell open when she slowly pulled the tie holding it together. Draco leaned up on his elbows, taking her in.

He met her eyes, arching an eyebrow. "That's what you've been wearing all night?"

She shrugged her shoulders, allowing the dress to slide from her body and pool at her feet. "Does it surprise you? Am I that much of a prude?"

He sat up, watching her kick her heels off. "My thoughts when it comes to you are *not* prudish."

She allowed him half a smile, then leaned forward, placing her palms on the end of the bed. His eyes dropped instantly to her chest and the flimsy fabric barely holding her breasts in.

"Again, it's all about you. *Your* thoughts..."

"No, I meant—"

She crawled onto the bed — stopping his words — and knelt between his legs. She touched her hands to his chest. "Mr Malfoy, you might want to lay down for this." She shoved him backwards and leaned over him. "Now, are you going to be a good boy or will I have to tie you up?"

Draco grinned, reaching up to pinch her nipple through the lace.

She sat back on her heels and smirked at him. "Tied up it is."

His arms flew above his head and the sash from her dress floated towards him, winding its way around his wrists and anchoring him to the headboard.

"If I'd known this was your kink..." He winked at her.

"Don't make me gag you as well."

"Maybe that's *my* kink."

"Hmm," she hummed, teaching behind her back. "Likes to be gagged. What about blindfolded?"

"Don't you fucking dare!" His eyes swirled with greys, the prospect of her covering his face angered him, but amused her.

"You like to watch. *That's* your kink."

She released the clasp on the bra and let it slide from her body. She took no small amount of pleasure in the way his body reacted. His cock — already hard — bounced on his belly, the thick knot beginning to form at its base.

How angry would he be if she covered his face? She smirked, and found she didn't really care.

"Granger," he warned. "If you cover my face..."

She dangled the tiny piece of lace in front of him. "You'll do what? Break those bonds and spank my arse?"

His hips lifted, despite the strain she could see on his face. He was fighting for control. The Alpha in him wanted out. But she wouldn't let him win.

Draco tugged at the restraints. "Granger..."

"Poor baby. Can't you get free?" She pitched her voice to sarcastic whine and laid the lace across his eyes. "Maybe you should try harder."

"Granger," he warned again. "Are you sure you want to play this game?"

"You can still see. It's only lace." She smiled sweetly at him and ran her finger down his chest. "But I'll make you a deal. If you can free yourself, you can have me *however* you want."

She saw his jaw clench, watched as his hips lifted once more, bit back her laugh as he tugged against the sash around his wrists. His lips moved, silently attempting to break the spell she had cast, but her magic was stronger than his and he knew it. There was no way he could counter the spell that now bound him.

"Oh, you can't break my magic?" she taunted, her fingers trailed along his thighs, circling over his hips and stomach. "I guess it must be tough being the second Alpha in the room."

He flicked his head to the side in an attempt to dislodge her bra from his face. "Let me see you."

Her hands continued to tease over his skin. "Might I remind you that you're not in charge here?"

"Granger, take this off my face!" He flicked his head again and the bra slipped down, covering his mouth.

Hermione laughed. "I think I like you gagged."

"Not funny." He lifted his head, shifting the lace with his chin.

"Oh, you don't like what I'm doing?" Her fingers brushed over his knot, making his entire body jerk, and he cursed. She held her hand up and looked up at him. "Too much?"

"Fuck no! Keep going."

She hesitated for a second, then Pansy's voice sounded inside her head.

Explore. Ask him what he likes.

"Like this?" She repeated the movement, brushing her fingertips lightly over him and gauging his reaction.

His eyes were on her, watching her hand, her face, her bare breasts. And his body tensed every time her fingers touched what was clearly the most sensitive part of him.

"That feels... *fuck* that feels good."

"Yeah?" She giggled at the sight of him. Her bra had lodged itself at his throat, one cup sitting just on his chin, the lace forming a pretty blue beard. She reached up and dragged it away, flinging it behind her. "Sorry. I should have listened to you."

He shook his head. "Don't apologise. Just keep doing what you were."

"You like it?" She bit her lip, her nerves beginning to surface.

"I love it." He nodded encouragingly. "Please keep going."

Hermione took a breath. It wasn't a demand. He wasn't trying to take control. He didn't think her ridiculous for touching him so lightly, for exploring, for learning what he liked.

Pansy's voice whispered inside her head once more.

...if he doesn't lose his load... try with... something else... your tongue, or your teeth... touch his balls...

"Granger, come back to me," Draco said quietly. "What you're doing is incredible. Please don't stop."

She shoved her nerves away and leaned over him. "Thank you."

"No, Ms Granger. *Thank you.*"

Hermione laughed, tracing the red scars on his broad chest. "Do you like to be teased?"

"I'm loving you teasing me." He tugged on the sash once more. "But I'm not sure I'm loving this."

She paused her fingers. "Do you want me to remove it?"

"No, it's... not yet." He nodded towards her hand. "What I want you to do is stop thinking and go back to what you were doing. My dick was enjoying the handshake."

Hermione giggled and kissed him quickly. "Well, if a handshake is all it takes..."

She reached down and stroked her hand over him while she kissed her way down his chest, his stomach, nipping at his hip.

"Your skin is so warm," she murmured.

"I've no idea why," he laughed.

She glanced up at him. "You have a fever?"

Draco snorted a laugh then choked when she ran her tongue along the length of him.

"Fuck," he growled. "More."

Moving slowly, she flattened her tongue against him and dragged it along the underside of his thick cock, from base to tip, flicking over the crown. He was already leaking and she was surprised at the sweet taste.

She glanced up at him. His eyes were fixed on her face, staring at her with a mixture of utter disbelief and unadulterated desire, a combination that spurred her on.

Pressing tiny, wet kisses back down the length of him, she paused at the base. Lifting her head, she studied him. His knot had swelled, and he looked even bigger than he truly was. His balls had pulled up tight and she could see the restraint in his body as he held himself still.

Tongue... teeth...

Her hands found his hips, her fingers digging into the hard muscle as she touched her lips to the thick knot. He hissed through gritted teeth, his cock twitching and lifting from his belly of its own accord. Grazing her teeth over his skin, he grunted, the sound like a drug to her senses and her own need grew heavy between her thighs.

She would never have dreamed performing this act would have such an effect on her. She assumed this would only be pleasurable for him, but the taste and feel of him, the visible reactions, the sounds, the scent of his arousal flowing from every pore — it was an experience she had not been prepared for.

But it was one she was thoroughly enjoying.

She began to tease him mercilessly. Teeth and hands and mouth and tongue. His pleasure growing with each touch.

Surrounding the tip of him with her lips, she opened her mouth and slowly drew him inside. Stroking her tongue over him, he shifted beneath her, sucking in a breath when she cupped his balls.

Hermione looked up at him. His jaw was set and his arms were tense, the tight muscles straining against her magic. He was struggling with being restrained, but she knew his Alpha pride wouldn't allow him to beg her to release him.

Stroking her fingers gently over the soft skin of his sac, she lifted her free hand and released him from the restraint. The sash slid away and his hands were on her instantly, his fingers threading through her hair and holding the unruly strands away from her face. She continued to slide her mouth over him, humming at the feel of his touch. He wasn't guiding her, wasn't trying to take control, he was just holding her. Watching her. Feeling her.

"Fucking hell," he groaned. "This is... everything you're doing is fucking perfect."

She hummed again, a surge of power rushing through her. This beautiful, strong man was falling apart. And it was all because of her.

Closing her eyes she fell into an easy rhythm, working her mouth and hand in time with the slow movement of his hips. His breath was heavy, deep grunts vibrated in his chest, and his hands tightened in her hair.

"*More*," he groaned. "Suck harder. Show me how much you love this."

She closed her lips around him, grazing her teeth against the tip and curling her hand tighter around his knot. A string of cursed nonsense spilled into the air.

Fuck... more... fuck that's... yes... fuck!

His body tensed, his thighs tightening, and his hips rocked up in sharp thrust. His cock throbbed against her tongue, and he pulled her mouth away.

"Coming, Granger," he warned in a deep growl. "Fucking coming."

Hermione squeezed her hand tighter around him. She watched, fascinated, as his heavy length pulsed against her palm and he came, wet and warm, covering his stomach and her fingers.

Draco's hand relaxed in her hair and his head thumped back onto the pillows. His breathing was choppy and he grabbed her wrist, murmuring, "Enough."

A shot of pride tingled along her spine and she smiled. She'd rendered him immobile, more so than any petrification charm could ever do.

But she wasn't finished with him.

She lifted her hand, hovering it over his stomach and whispering, "*Scourgify*." The mess vanished and she crawled over him, her knees pressing into the mattress either side of his hips. He opened his eyes and lifted his head, watching the place where her slick skin slid over his still-hard cock.

"Granger," he groaned, his hands gripping her hips in an attempt to stop her movements. "Give me a minute."

She laughed and brushed her fingers across his chest. "You're an Alpha, Malfoy. You can go all night. Or was that a lie?"

"After *that*, it's definitely a lie."

She rose above him and reached between them. He was still hard, still pulsing, twitching eagerly and she teased the tip against her entrance. "Well, little Draco says otherwise."

She sank down onto him, both exhaling heavily as she took him inside her. He felt so good. The stretch and pull of her body around him. The length of him hard against her sensitive walls. This was what she wanted. To feel him like this. Giving himself to her. Giving her everything.

Placing her palms on his chest, she began to move, rocking her hips and slowly finding the right angle, the right rhythm. She slid along the length of him, feeling every solid inch, every ridge, every vein. It was a sensation she'd not had the chance to completely feel the first time. She'd been too concerned with not dying from pleasure.

But this... him...

She curled her fingers into his chest, feeling the steady thump of his heart, watching the heavy rise and fall as he tried to control his breathing.

Rolling her hips back, she ran her palms across his chest, feeling the firm definition of every muscle. Curving around his ribs. Down his stomach, tracing every smooth inch of him before covering his hands on her hips.

Every one of her senses was suddenly heightened. Everything became more vibrant — an explosion of sensations like fireworks under her skin.

Was this what he had felt the first time he'd been inside her? Had he felt everything at once? Felt the euphoric feeling of pure pleasure in every cell in his body?

Hermione let her head drop back as a white-hot wave swept over her.

"No," she choked. She'd barely started and she was already falling. "No... not yet."

Draco's fingers dug into her hips, holding her steady.

"Come," he growled. "Give in and come on my cock."

A clenching orgasm shot through her like wildfire, blurring her brain, and rolling her eyes back in her head.

It was heaven.
Nirvana.
Paradise.

And she'd only just started.

She opened her eyes, her body shuddering, and looked down at him. He was smiling at her, cocky as hell she'd come so quickly.

"Shut up," she told him and he laughed.

"How good did it feel?" He squeezed her hips. "To just let go, to not think? How did it feel?"

"So good," she breathed.

"Then..." he slid his hands along her thighs "...do it again."

Hermione dragged her bottom lip through her teeth, linking her fingers with his when he lifted his hand to her.

How did he do it? How did he become the one person her entire being reacted to so strongly? Why was he the one person who frustrated her to the point of madness, then made her laugh just moments later?

She hated being vulnerable, was terrified of losing herself. She needed to feel like the woman she had worked so hard to become and not be labelled as simply a female Alpha.

But the thrill of him — the way they fit — curled a deep warmth inside her that told her she was safe.

Safe with him.

He would never allow her to be anything but who she was.

"Granger?" Draco whispered her name, his eyes searching hers.

"I'm right here," she whispered and reached for his other hand. "I'm right here with you."

His fingers squeezed hers, and she closed her eyes, just feeling the endless strength of him underneath her. She was anchored to him in a way that was more than his cock inside her, more than the Alpha instinct they both shared.

It was a deeper feeling.

Not something he was doing to her.

Not something she was doing to him.

It was them. Him and her. Together.

As one.

She opened her eyes and he was watching her. His eyes glowed brilliant blue and he smiled slowly, knowing that she had finally given herself to him completely.

"Look at you, Granger. You are a goddess over me." He pulled her down to him, releasing their joined hands and threading his fingers through her hair. "You own me, Granger. I belong only to you."

He smiled again, then kissed her like the world was ending, slanting his mouth over hers and groaning into her open mouth. She shifted her hips, needing the friction inside her once more, and he settled his hands on her the curve of her arse, urging her to chase what she wanted.

Curling her arms around his head, she slid her body over his, moving along his length in a torturously slow slide. She found the gland at his throat with her tongue, causing him to shudder and thrust up as she slid down.

Hermione's gasps mingled with his grunts, and she sat up, needing the space to move, to chase the ache that was building and boiling inside her. Draco was watching her with reverence, like she truly was the goddess he named her as.

And she felt the overwhelming need to prove it.

Planting her palms on his chest again, her confidence growing — she'd brought him over once, she could certainly do it again — she found her rhythm once more.

Up and down, she teased him. Up and down, the length of him slid through her. Up and down, she forgot about everything and lost herself in the feel of him.

Just him and her. The hardness of him. The wetness of her.

Draco cursed, groaning her name, and thrusting his hips up to meet hers. Moving, rocking, their bodies pressed together. Meeting and parting, over and over, each pushing the other harder, deeper, until her breath was little more than gasps, and bursts of white stars coloured her vision.

Then she shocked him.

She lifted her hips one last time and came down hard over the entire length of him, his knot filling and stretching her body, then locking inside her.

His spine snapped in a sharp arc and she felt him swell, felt her own body clench hard around him. His eyes snapped open and with a roar he released his seed, pumping hot, fiery bursts into the depths of her being.

Her whole body arched, and she began to fall. Her mind went blank, all her fears and doubts leaving her for just this moment. A spark ignited inside her, growing and spreading, winding through her and pulling her apart in the most pleasurable way she could ever imagine.

She threw her head back, crying out his name in a voice she barely recognised. Raw and unhinged, wild and untamed. A rough and rasping cry of worship to the beautiful blue-eyed man beneath her.

Falling forward, his strong arms caught her and held her to him. His mouth was on her throat instantly, lapping at the gland with a desperate need.

Threading her hands in his damp hair, she wrenched his head back.

"No," she gasped. "Too much."

He growled and held her tighter, as if trying to pull her body inside his. She could scent the Alpha possessiveness, and this time it wasn't just his.

She stared down at him, their eyes locking, and she knew.

She didn't just want to mark him.

She wanted to claim him.

Chapter 22

"Granger?"

Hermione continued to stare at him, her revelation swirling in her mind.

She wanted to claim him.

Claim him. As her own.

It's only been three months.

And for half of that time he hated her.

She tried to shift off him, but he held her still.

"You can't move," he reminded her. "Not yet."

She nodded and buried her face against his chest. The euphoria of her orgasm had quickly disappeared and the self-doubt crept back in.

Closing her eyes, Hermione could hear the beat of his heart — a beautiful thumping sound that slowed as his breathing eased and his own pleasure ebbed from his body. His lips pressed to the top of her head as the covers slid over them, cocooning them in the warmth still radiating from their skin.

He didn't speak, just wrapped his arms around her, letting the quiet stillness envelope her. She knew he sensed something was wrong, but he was giving her the chance to think it through.

Claim him.

The thought should have terrified her. But in her heart, she knew this was her future. *He* was her future. She saw it clearly. Felt it to her very core.

Three months. Three months since Ron had walked into her office and her whole world had changed. Three months that had been a blur.

And the only clarity in that blur had been him.

The anger and possessiveness. The heated tempers, the fight for dominance. The warmth and the laughter.

The desire.

All of it infuriated her, but it also soothed and calmed her.

"Okay?" he whispered after an age.

"Yeah," Hermione said quietly. "Just thinking."

He stroked his fingers along her spine. A gentle, slow movement that was lulling her into a trance.

"How did it feel," he asked gently, "when you *weren't* thinking? When you were just lost in the moment?"

She smiled. "It felt incredible."

"I love that you think things through," he said carefully. "I love that you want to do everything perfectly, and Darling, *everything* you did was perfect. And you did it without thinking. You just felt."

"*Mostly* without thinking," she corrected. "Pansy might have had a few pointers to share."

"Pansy?" he asked, then began to laugh. "How did *that* conversation go?"

"It was very informative. Pansy is very wise."

Draco kissed the top of her head again. "Remind me to thank her next time I see her."

Hermione traced her finger along a curved scar on his chest. "It was okay then?"

"*Okay?*" He rubbed one hand gently up and down her arm. "Everything you did was incredible. Don't ever doubt yourself again."

"Are you sure?" She knew he meant what he said, but that niggling doubt still lingered.

"Darling, please stop thinking. Just for a minute." He hooked his chin over the top of her head and looped his arms back around her, holding her close. "Tell me what that look was on your face. Right at the end. You were absolutely stunning and your eyes were as golden as I've ever seen them."

"It was... I wanted to..." she sighed. "You said you loved me."

"I did," Draco agreed. "And you scoffed."

"Yeah, sorry about that." She winced. After the realisation that she just had, she understood what he meant. He knew the woman he was meant to be with, his Alpha instincts hadn't allowed him to fall for anyone else. The Alpha in him had waited. And she now knew why.

The moment she'd allowed herself to let go of her anger and fear, and just feel, everything seemed to slide into place. It was a lightbulb moment if there ever was one. Everything inside her screamed that he was the one. He was her Alpha. Her mate.

"You're thinking again."

"I said you'd have to get used to it."

"Then tell me. Whatever it is inside that giant brain of yours, just tell me."

"You marked me. I'm not cross about it, but when you did it, I didn't even think to do the same to you." She lifted her head and gave him a lopsided smile. "Giant brain and all."

Draco simply laughed and waited for her to continue.

"But in that last moment, I realised something. I don't need to mark you." She kissed his jaw. "No woman will come near you again." She kissed the corner of his mouth. "They will all know it's not in their best interest to even *think* about you, let alone touch you." She traced his lip with her tongue. "I am Hermione Granger. I am an Alpha. And you, Draco Malfoy, are my mate."

Her teeth grazed over the gland in his neck and he hissed when she bit down gently. He gripped her hair, gently pulling her away.

"Be careful. Biting me there could lead to us being bonded."

She stared down at him. Claimed. Bonded. Mated for thought settled over her with an unexpected ease.

"Maybe that's what I want. Maybe I've decided."

His eyes glowed. The turquoise blue she so adored shone back at her.

"Hermione..." his voice was a disbelieving breath. "You have to be sure. This is a sealed deal."

"I know what I want, Draco..." She leaned back down and ran her tongue along his jaw. "...and that's you."

He stared at her for what seemed like an age before stretching his head back, offering up his gland. His submission. "I'm yours, Granger."

She bit down hard, breaking his skin. The taste of his blood was metallic on her tongue. She pulled away with a grimace — it was unpleasant to say the least. And the 'flowing magic' she'd read about was nowhere to be found.

"Is that it?" Draco sounded as confused as she felt.

"I don't know. Do you feel different?"

He shook his head. "There's an awful sting in my neck, but other than that, I feel nothing."

"Nothing?"

He shook his head again. "Did you do it correctly?"

She shot him a look of incredulity. "How many ways are there to bite someone, Draco?"

"Maybe I have to bite you?" He held his hand up. "I don't mean that in some chauvinistic way, but maybe it's a two-way thing."

Hermione nodded. "Maybe. Give it a shot."

He rolled them over carefully; he was still locked inside her, his cock showing no signs of flagging any time soon. She tilted her head to the side as he dragged her hair away, "Ready?"

She nodded and closed her eyes, jumping at the graze of his teeth and letting out a quiet yelp when his teeth broke her skin.

"Fuck," Draco gagged. "That's unpleasant."

"And it fucking hurt."

He pressed his thumb to her wound. "Sorry. I guess we did this wrong."

She shook her head and touched his cheek. "This is going to be an awkward conversation with your mother."

"My darlings!" Narcissa's smile was warm and her delight at seeing them together had become a permanent fixture on her face. "What brings you both here?"

"Since you love seeing Granger, we thought we'd just stop in." Draco rolled his eyes, but smiled as his mother hugged her. Hermione knew Draco loved that she and his mother got along, even if he pretended he didn't.

"Yes, well, I love seeing you too, Draco." Narcissa kissed his cheek then called for Keely to make tea and they moved to the sitting room that overlooked the gardens. "Now, what's happened?"

"Why do you think something's happened?" Draco asked, waiting for both women to be seated.

Hermione smiled up at him. His old-school manners were long ingrained into him, but that didn't stop him from placing his hand on her thigh when he sat beside her.

"You both looked concerned," Narcissa told them. "Your eyes give you away."

"We have some questions," Hermione began, but stopped when Lucius entered the room.

"I thought I heard the excited squeals of my wife." Lucius smiled adoringly at Narcissa. "I assumed her favourite person was here, Hermione."

Hermione smiled nervously and Draco glanced at her. "He'll leave if you want."

"I'm interrupting," Lucius said with a nod. "My apologies."

"No, it's fine, Lucius," Hermione replied. "It might be easier for Draco if you're here. We just have some questions and they're a little, *um*, sensitive."

"If you're sure." Lucius sat beside Narcissa when Hermione affirmed it was fine.

"We just had some questions regarding Alphas and bonding. But, it's slightly embarrassing."

Narcissa sucked in a breath and Hermione knew exactly what she was thinking — bonding meant grandchildren.

"You might as well just tell her," Draco said. "I don't think I've ever seen my mother this close to exploding."

Hermione huffed out a laugh as Narcissa scowled at him, and then she linked her fingers with his. "Draco and I have decided that we want to be bonded."

His mother pressed her fingers to her mouth, but she was almost shaking with excitement. "Oh, my darlings. This is wonderful. Why ever do you think this is embarrassing?"

"Well..." Draco began, glancing at Hermione. "We, ah..."

"We already tried it, but nothing happened." Hermione finished for him, her cheeks heating up.

"Oh." She looked between them., "What was it that you tried?"

"Biting each other's glands." Hermione said. "It's what all the books say has to happen. I tried first, then Draco. But neither worked."

"That's the usual method, as far as I'm aware," Narcissa said with a thoughtful frown. "Were you engaged in intercourse at the time?"

"Mother!" Draco exclaimed. "I'm not sure that's relevant."

Lucius chuckled. "I think it's very important in this case, Draco."

"How is that fact important?" Draco shifted uncomfortably.

"It's part of an Alpha's bonding." Narcissa explained. "Sex plays a big part in bonding an Alpha to their mate."

"We, *ah*, had just finished," Hermione admitted. "Draco had..." she squeezed her eyes shut and took a breath. "Draco had knotted and was still locked inside me."

"That's the ritual as far as I am aware," Narcissa said. "It should have been successful."

"Is it the female aspect?" Hermione asked. "Does Draco not recognise me and vice versa?"

"It could be," Narcissa agreed.

"Or it could be something else entirely," Lucius said.

They all looked at him.

"Well, in the entire history of Alpha, Beta, and Omega pairings, not once has there been two Alphas. So it is possible that a different bonding ceremony must take place." Lucius pointed out. "And with no disrespect meant, Hermione, the traditional binding might not recognise you because you're Muggle-born. It is possible you may have to do some kind of Muggle ceremony."

"So you think this is because I'm a Mudblood?" Anger bubbled inside her at his assumption.

"I said nothing of the sort," Lucius replied.

"Ah, 'you're muggle-born'. That's what you said, right?"

"Yes, Hermione, that's what I said. What I *did not* say, however, is that your blood is dirty." Lucius leaned forward, "and if you'll let me explain?"

She nodded and he continued.

"What I was trying to say was, you are an anomaly. Not just a female Alpha, but a Muggle-born Alpha. That has never happened in the history of Alphas. They've only ever been from Pureblood families. Do I have the facts correct?" He looked at her for a response and she nodded. "So, maybe there is a part of this particular bonding that must be a part of you and the world you first grew up in. For your magic to recognise Draco's, and for his to recognise yours, there might be a certain ritual that has to occur alongside the traditional one that would normally occur."

"That actually makes sense." Draco turned to her. "What kind of rituals do you have in the muggle world?"

Hermione shrugged. "There's so many different ones. I wouldn't even know which one to choose."

"What about you specifically?" Narcissa asked. "Here in Muggle England, what would be the most traditional ceremony?"

"Um, a vicar in a church. Bride in a white dress, a nervous groom. Family and friends to witness it. Massive party afterwards. It's pretty basic. I can't imagine it would be considered a binding ceremony. Not in magical terms."

"No, that's probably not something that will help in this situation." Narcissa drummed her fingers in the arm of the chair. "There has to be a ritual that crosses the Muggle and magical lines. I'm certain all Alphas have not chosen only pureblood Betas throughout the centuries. There must be something somewhere that tells us how the pairings united."

"Well, fortunately for us, we have Hermione Granger in our midst." Draco kissed her temple. "The research queen will no doubt find a solution."

"Access the library here any time, Hermione," Lucius told her. "The volumes we have are extensive and you are welcome to them whenever you wish. We'll change the wards to allow the Manor to recognise you as family."

Narcissa smiled and reached out to take his hand. Lucius returned her smile and Hermione couldn't help but notice the complete adoration between them. A small wave of contentment washed over her, and all the feelings that were aimed toward Lucius seemed to disappear in an instant.

"What just happened?" Draco asked, his eyes wide with alarm.

"What do you mean?"

"You've kind of gone all weird and smiley at my father."

"I'm not sure," she said. "All those feelings that usually stir when I'm near him have gone. I've no idea what just happened."

"You're a Malfoy now," Narcissa stated.

"But we're not bonded yet." Hermione glanced at all three of them. "And I don't know if I'll take the Malfoy name."

"You don't have to take the Malfoy name," Lucius told her. "Times have changed and it's not expected. But as the head of the Malfoy house, it is my prerogative to choose those I wish to be considered as family."

"This is... I don't know what to say."

"Hermione, sweetheart, you have tamed my son," Lucius said. "Not only that, I see in him just how much he loves and adores you. And I see the same in you. You are now a Malfoy, Hermione, even if your name remains Granger. You are welcome here, and we are honoured to have you as a part of this family."

Hermione glanced up at Draco. His eyes were turquoise blue and he was looking at her with the same adoration that his father had shown when he looked at his mother. The same feeling of contentment washed over her again and she curled into his side.

"Okay?" he asked.

"Yeah," she whispered. "I'm a Malfoy."

"Oh, here's a brilliant one." Pansy clapped her hands. "The bride must wear the underwear of a female who has already been pregnant to encourage fertility."

"Good thing mum's not here," Ginny snorted.

Daphne glanced at Narcissa. "You're the only woman here who's had a child..."

"No," Hermione said bluntly. "Next one."

Narcissa glanced cautiously at Hermione. "I do want grandbabies..."

Hermione turned to Narcissa. "I'm sorry, but I'm not wearing my mother-in-law's underwear at this ceremony."

"I don't know, Hermione," Pansy tapped the passage in the book. "This obsession you have with Lucius... you and Draco could role play after the ceremony."

"Next!" Hermione and Narcissa cried together.

Pansy cracked up laughing, "Okay, but if Narcissa wants grandbabies soon, here's another one. After the ceremony, an infant is placed in the couple's bed to enhance fertility."

"Who do we know that has a baby?" Hannah asked, laughing at the horrified glare Hermione was sending her way.

"This is *not* about babies," Hermione said firmly. "This is about finding a way that Draco and I can bond. If that doesn't happen, there will definitely be no babies!"

For a week, Hermione had scoured the Malfoy library, her own book shop, the Hogwarts library and even the Ministry vaults. She'd sent out more owls than she cared to count to her contacts in the book world, but no new information came about.

She was frustrated and her friends weren't helping.

"Here's another good one," Hannah held up the book she was reading. "The bridesmaids give the groom a hard time on the morning of the wedding. They set a series of tests to see if he's worthy. Then he must pay off the bridesmaids with envelopes full of money."

"I could do with some Malfoy gold." Daphne chuckled.

"Who said any of you would be bridesmaids?" Hermione asked and they all protested.

"Of course we'll be bridesmaids," Ginny said confidently. "Two Alphas getting hitched? It'll be the wedding of the century. We're not missing out."

"There may not even be a fucking wedding!" Hermione yelled, her frustration finally winning out. "There's no reason to have bridesmaids if a wedding is pointless."

Narcissa touched her shoulder. "Hermione, darling, we'll figure this out. There has to be something we're missing and I'm sure we'll find it."

"Sorry," Hermione said quietly. "I just thought this would be easy."

"Granger, it will be easy. We just have to keep looking." Pansy moved to sit beside Hermione on the couch, looping an arm through hers. "But you have to realise, some of these traditions are quite funny."

"Yeah, I guess," Hermione agreed. "I didn't want any fuss. The entire world is watching our every move and I just wanted this one thing to be done without any fanfare." She glanced up at Narcissa. "Sorry. You probably wanted a big, fancy affair for Draco, but that's just not me."

"Darling, this is about you and Draco, not any of us." Narcissa glanced around sternly at the others. "You can have anything you want."

"Hermione?" Daphne spoke up. "I might have found something. It's an old Pureblood ceremony. Not for Alphas, just... well, listen. Family circles. The bride and groom surround themselves with three family circles. The parents form the first circle, siblings the second, close friends and other family make up the third. The couple hold opposing hands which are bound together by an item of significance to the respective family, and their magic is sealed together in an unbreakable bond. The traditional bonds of marriage are performed by a high Wizard or Witch from the Order of Valar."

"That sounds promising." Pansy squeezed Hermione's arm but Hermione simply shrugged.

"Unfortunately I'm not pureblood and I have no family."

"We're your family," Hannah told her. "All of us love you like a sister,"

"I'm not sure that'd be enough."

"But we are your family," Ginny said, her eyes flashing with excitement. "We can actually make this work."

"Ginny, what—" Hermione began, but Ginny disappeared into the Floo just as Draco stepped out.

"Be right back," she yelled.

"This should be interesting." Pansy said.

"What's happening?" Draco asked.

"Apparently Ginny has a solution to the bonding issue," Hermione told him.

"Should be very interesting then." He crossed the room and Pansy shifted back to the armchair allowing him to sit beside her.

"Daphne might have found a pureblood ceremony that could work, but old Mudblood here is causing an issue." Pansy winked at Hermione.

"Pansy Parkinson!" Narcissa looked ready to *Avada* her.

"It's fine, Narcissa," Hermione said. "Pansy's usually an arse."

"Just trying to lighten the mood," Pansy told them with a wolfish grin.

"You will *not* use that term *ever* again, Pansy." Narcissa was furious. "It is not to be used in any capacity and certainly not in jest."

"But, Hermione said—"

"I don't care what Hermione said. Don't let me hear it again."

"Yeah, alright. Sorry," Pansy said, suitably chastened.

Draco sniggered. "Careful or next she'll be sending you to your room."

"Shut up, arsehole," Pansy snarked.

"I thought you were all adults." Narcissa was shaking her head in disgust.

The Floo lit up and Ginny reappeared, excitement rolling off her in waves. Molly and Arthur stepped out behind her looking equally as pleased.

"Here's the solution!" Ginny indicated her parents. "They'll adopt you!"

"What?" The word was a collective cry of disbelief from everyone.

Ginny was nodding enthusiastically. "You need a family, a pureblood one, and Mum and Dad think of you as one of us anyway. So why not?"

"Ginny, that's..." Hermione was dumbstruck. "It's a lot to ask. And I'm not sure it would be allowed. I'm an adult."

"Not according to Narcissa." Pansy had her arms crossed over her chest and was sulking.

"That's only you, Pans," Draco answered. "But this is definitely a possibility."

"Molly, Arthur?" Hermione flicked her wrist and two extra chairs appeared out of nowhere. "This is a big deal for you. I can't ask you to do this if you don't want to."

"Hermione, dear, we love you as much as any of our own children." Molly was almost vibrating with excitement. "And you need us to help, so it's not even a question."

Hermione looked to Arthur. "Are you sure?"

"Of course!" Arthur rubbed his hands together. "We'll go to the Ministry tomorrow and I'll pull some strings. You'll be a Weasley in no time."

Pansy forgot that she was sulking and started to laugh. "A Malfoy marrying a Weasley. I never thought I'd ever hear that sentence."

"Lucius already deemed me a Malfoy," Hermione said. "But I'd be proud to be a Weasley."

"Hermione Granger-Malfoy-Weasley." Hannah laughed. "Your poor children."

Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Heads turned, jaws dropped, fingers pointed, and loud whispers followed them as they entered the Ministry.

Draco's hand squeezed hers as she smiled up at him.

"Did a celebrity walk in?"

"Yeah, one Hermione Granger. War heroine. You've probably heard of her."

"Nope." Hermione shook her head. "Hermione? Really? What kind of name is that? Sounds pretentious."

"You have no idea," Draco laughed. "Just ignore them. They'll all just look at you and then gossip about you later."

"I'm fairly certain they've all been in my shop to look at me already. Apparently none of them knew what I looked like before I became an Alpha."

They stopped in front of the bank of lifts and Hermione rolled her eyes at the sudden flood of people who needed to go upstairs. She leaned closer to Draco and whispered, "Do they think we're going to fuck in the lift?"

Draco almost choked, pressing his fist to his mouth disguising his surprise as a cough. "You can't say things like that."

"Why not?"

He leaned down and murmured close to her ear, "Because I might have to hire a lift and find out if that's something you like."

"Maybe you should put it on your list."

"Fuck," he swore under his breath as the door slid open and they stepped in. Several people followed them and Draco deliberately stood in the centre, pulling her in front of him.

Hermione pressed the button for the second floor. Then the third floor. Then the fourth. Draco laughed as she continued to press each button, ensuring everyone would be inconvenienced since they were getting off on the second floor.

"I do hope no one's in a hurry," Hermione snickered.

The doors opened at the second floor and they were met with the smiling faces of Molly and Arthur.

"Here you are!" Arthur clapped Draco on the back while Molly embraced Hermione. "Are you ready?"

Hermione nodded, but her nerves kicked in as Arthur led them into the Family Services Department. There was no way it could be this easy. And she knew the instant she saw Arthur approach a wizard at the end of the hallway that something was wrong.

The man's face was set and he wouldn't meet her eye.

"Reed, tell me you have good news!" Arthur's jovial voice boomed in the hallway.

"Maybe if you all come inside—" he indicated the open door to what Hermione assumed was his office "—I'll explain the... details."

Hermione's stomach sank. She should have known better than to get her hopes up. Nothing about what she'd been dealing with had been easy; why should this be any different?

"Are the papers ready?" Arthur asked and the man he'd referred to as Reed held up his hand.

"It's not as easy as that, Arthur." Reed turned to Hermione. "Ms Granger, Arthur explained his and Molly's intention to adopt you to enable some kind of bonding ceremony. However, your birth parents are still alive and therefore, without a dissolution of that child-parent bond, the adoption can't take place."

"But my parents don't know who I am. Their memories have been Obliviated and they have no idea they have a daughter."

"Unfortunately that doesn't change the fact that you are still bound to them," Reed explained. "Obliviated memories are retrievable—"

"Theirs aren't," Hermione said. "The charm I used was too strong and even the most capable Healers haven't been able to reverse it."

"I understand that, Ms Granger. However, as I said, the only way to enable this adoption is to dissolve the parental bond."

"How do we dissolve it?" Arthur asked but Hermione shook her head.

"No. They might not remember me, but they're still my parents and I won't allow that to change."

"Couldn't they be declared incompetent?" Arthur asked.

"We thought of that, but since Ms Granger is an adult, their competency isn't the issue."

"Surely there's a way around it." Arthur glanced between Hermione and Reed.

"Sorry, Arthur, there isn't," Reed apologised. "Unless Ms Granger or her parents agree to a complete separation, there's nothing to be done."

"Then there is nothing to be done," Hermione said firmly. "I won't agree to this."

"Hermione, dear," Molly began cautiously. "The bond with Draco might not work if you refuse this."

"Molly, Arthur, I really appreciate that you were willing to do this, but bonding with Draco isn't more important than my parents." Hermione fought to keep her voice even as she looked up at Draco. "And I will not give them up for anyone."

"And nor should you," Draco assured her. "There'll be another way."

Her voice rose in panic and she shook her head. "Even if there's not, Draco, I won't dissolve my family. I won't do it."

"Hey, it's okay." He pulled her to him, folding his arms around her. "I would never ask that of you."

Molly took her hand and smiled warmly. "None of us will force you to do this, dear. Family is more important than anything. We all know that. We'll keep searching for another way."

"I really am sorry, Ms Granger." Reed smiled sympathetically. "Arthur is well respected here at the Ministry, but we can't bend this rule. Not even a little bit."

"It's not your fault." Hermione sighed. "I appreciate everything and I don't want rules bent for any reason."

"That's a change from your school days," Draco said, trying to lighten the mood.

"Not funny." Hermione looked up at him, but she was smiling.

"School days." Draco all but slapped his forehead in exasperation. "I'm an idiot."

"Draco, what's going on?" Hermione asked, alarmed.

"We've all missed the obvious." He gripped both her shoulders and grinned. "We're not the only Alphas and the other one is already bonded."

"Alexander," Hermione said.

Draco nodded in agreement. "Alexander."

"But what if I react to him like I did with Lucius?"

"Lucius is my father. You reacted to him like you did because of me."

"But what if it wasn't that?" Hermione asked. "What if the Alpha in me actually wants Lucius but can't have him because of Narcissa, so it just settled for you?"

"Highly unlikely, Granger. Your... performances to date tell me the Alpha knows who it wants."

"Okay, but what if three Alphas together becomes a clash of egos? What if us all being together makes... I don't know... the world explode?"

"You need to stop," Draco finally said, laughing. "The world won't explode. I've been in a room with him and we're all still here."

"But what if I'm the catalyst? What if—*mmph!*"

Draco covered her mouth with his hand. "We are simply meeting Alexander. Yes, he's an Alpha and yes, you *might* react to him. But since he's bonded, it will most likely be similar to my father. *And* nothing insane is going to happen. Other than you being ridiculous."

"*Sowwy.*" Her voice was muffled behind his hand.

"I know you like to be prepared and ask questions, but questions that make no sense won't help." Draco moved his hand away. "Are you going to stay calm?"

"Yeah. Sorry." She pursed her lips making him laugh.

"You have one more question?"

"What if I do react to him? How will you handle that?"

"I'll probably rip his head off," he said with a shrug. "But I think you're worrying for nothing."

"You're very confident about this."

"Because I know nothing's going to happen." Draco held out his arm and Hermione curled her hand around his elbow. "Are you ready?"

"How do—" Her question was cut off when he Disapparated them to Alexander's doorstep.

"I just know, Granger." Draco knocked on the door. "And you'll see why in a second."

The door opened and Alexander Avery's smiling face greeted them. Hermione's jaw dropped; he was most certainly an Alpha.

He stood at least a head taller than Draco, his chest was broad, and his solid frame filled the doorway. His mere presence commanded respect, but his smile was so warm and friendly.

"Draco, it's good to see you again."

"Alexander, thanks for this." Draco shook his hand. "And I'd like you to meet Hermione Granger."

"Hermione, it's lovely to finally meet you." Alexander said and Hermione's hormones went into overdrive.

His voice was deep and rich, melting over her like warm chocolate. And as hard as she tried, she couldn't stop herself from scenting the air. There was the sharp scent of pine, of freshly sawn wood. It was so different from Draco. Earthy and grounding. Simple.

But there was something else. Something... biting and acrid.

"What is that?" she asked, scrunching up her nose and both men laughed.

"That is a bonded male," Draco explained. "Oddly, I scented it when I first met Alexander. It goes away after a few minutes."

"It's different from Lucius. It's..." Hermione sniffed the air again. "It's like a warning to stay away."

"That would be my fault," a feminine voice said, coming from the hallway behind Alexander. "And invite them in, Alexander."

"Of course, sorry." Alexander stepped aside and ushered them in. They were met with the smiling face of a gorgeous woman who could have been mistaken for one of the Patil twins. "This is my wife, Zahira."

"I'm glad to be finally meeting you." She reached for Hermione's hand. "Parvati spoke of you often."

"I thought there was a resemblance." Hermione smiled warmly.

"She's my cousin. Our fathers are twins actually — it's why the resemblance is so strong," Zahira informed her. "She and Padma raved about you the first summer they came home from Hogwarts. You were a bigger hit with them than Harry Potter was."

"Hardly," Hermione said with a laugh, following her into the sitting room. Two small sofas sat opposite each other with a small coffee table separating them. "I was just a know-it-all swot."

"From what I hear, you were much more than that."

"Oh, believe me," Draco said, sitting beside Hermione on one sofa. "She was *much* more than that."

"Sounds like my cousins weren't the only ones admiring her." Zahira chuckled.

"Oh, Merlin no!" Draco laughed. "I was *not* a fan back then." He paused and glanced at Hermione. "Well, not immediately anyway. Not until I realised how talented she truly was."

"I thought it was when I punched your nose," Hermione said with a straight face.

"No, that just pissed me off more." Draco kissed her cheek. "I was the laughing stock of Slytherin for weeks."

"I count that as a success then."

"How have you two not bonded yet?" Zahira asked. "You're perfect together."

"That's why we're here," Draco began. "We have tried, but it was a massive failure and we've no idea what went wrong. We thought it might be a pureblood thing, so Molly and Arthur Weasley offered to adopt her so Hermione could possibly be considered a pureblood, but that came with more issues. So we thought — if you don't mind — since there was one available, we'd ask a bonded pair."

"What was the reason the Weasleys couldn't adopt you?" Zahira asked.

"Actually they could," Hermione explained. "But I had to separate from my own parents so the adoption was legal, and I refused to do that. My parents had their minds modified before the war and they don't remember me at all, but I won't give them up."

"I'm glad you didn't." Zahira nodded towards Draco. "Sorry, Draco, but if that had been my choice, I wouldn't have given up my family either."

"I didn't expect her to," Draco replied. "And I'm fairly certain if I had asked her to, we wouldn't be sitting here with you. And my parents would be planning my memorial service."

They all laughed, and Hermione winked at him and ran her knuckles along his jaw.

"I don't think it's a pureblood thing," Alexander said. "Zahira is half-blood, and we had no issues."

"I'm Muggleborn though," Hermione explained. "There's no other magic in my family; I'm the first and only."

"I'm not sure why it would be an issue." Alexander frowned. "I mean, you're both Alphas, you've chosen your mate, that should be it."

"That's what we thought." Hermione looked at Draco and slid her hand into his. "How did it work with the both of you? I mean, an Alpha and a Beta, that would have had to be something different."

"It was," Alexander agreed. "Betas are what is considered normal; no glands to bite. But there are records that explain Alpha-Beta bondings."

"We had a traditional pureblood ceremony." Zahira glanced at Alexander. "Family circles, I think it was called—"

"That's what Daphne found." Hermione's stomach dropped. "It's why Molly and Arthur offered to adopt me. I need parents for this ceremony."

Alexander shook his head. "No, you actually don't. Zahira's parents were killed in the war, so her aunt and uncle stepped in."

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Zahira." Hermione winced in sympathy.

"We both are," Draco added and Hermione squeezed his hand; she knew he still blamed himself for the events of the war and the part he played. The guilt was buried deep, but their conversations had often brought it to the surface, and every time she assured him he wasn't to blame.

Zahira held her hand up. "Thank you, but it's fine. I miss them, but life has to go on. They would have hated for me to wallow in misery." She reached for Alexander's hand. "And this is exactly what we were fighting for. Purebloods, half-bloods, and Muggleborns being able to coexist without discrimination."

"But you still did a pureblood ceremony?" Hermione asked.

"We did." Zahira nodded. "We had to. Alphas have always been pureblood... until now, of course."

"So that's what bonded you, just the ceremony?" Draco sounded hopeful.

The pair looked at each other and grinned.

"Well, there was a little more to it." Alexander winked at them. "A blood bond still had to be made."

"How was it possible without glands on Zahira?" Draco asked.

"Was this not explained to you?" Alexander looked at him curiously. "You know there have been only a few Alpha-Omega pairings throughout history, right?" Draco nodded and he continued. "Alpha males have bonded with Betas more often, so the ritual is known."

Hermione glanced at Draco. "Does your mother not know this?"

Draco shrugged. "I guess not. She would have told us if she knew. But I wasn't the most receptive person when I changed and didn't listen to much of what she told me. I might have had a slight ego problem."

"Well, it was actually very simple for us," Zahira continued. "I took a potion which pretty much turned me into an Omega for a few hours. It enlarged a gland at my throat and I essentially went into a heat. Alexander knotted in me and the blood bond took place. It was a wild trip."

"A potion did that?" Draco was astonished. "I've never heard of it."

"It's pretty rare," Zahira said. "It's only needed when there's an Alpha-Beta pairing, and that's usually only a few times each century. *Silvers* is the only place that makes it and only on request, obviously. It takes three weeks and is clearly only needed in these situations."

"Unfortunately, that's not going to work for us," Hermione pointed out. "I have the glands already. I don't need a potion to produce them."

"No, but maybe it's the heat thing," Alexander suggested. "A male Alpha probably needs that to recognise—"

"But I don't need that," Hermione cut him off. "I'm an Alpha, in case you've forgotten, and I recognise that he's my mate."

"I'm just guessing." Alexander held up one hand in apology. "It's just what we had to do."

"Yeah, but Zahira still had to become a submissive for you to be able to bond. It basically comes down to the male having to be the dominant one."

"No, it's not like that." Alexander was shaking his head. "I've never thought of Zahira as anything less than my equal."

"But she still had to be less than you for the bond to be completed." Hermione was incensed. "I'm an Alpha and to be bonded with my mate I have to be submissive. This is utter bullshit! I might as well have been a fucking Omega!"

"Hermione," Zahira said calmly. "This is what we did. It doesn't necessarily mean it's what you'll have to do."

"But everything points in that direction, doesn't it?" Hermione dropped Draco's hand and stood. "Everything I am doesn't matter. And it hasn't mattered since I changed. No one gave the same respect as the male Alphas — not even you, Draco. And now I have to be less again? Well, I won't do it. I won't do any of it."

"Darling—" Draco stood, but she shoved past him.

"Hermione, please don't leave," Zahira called, but Hermione ignored her.

She stepped out the front door, slamming it in frustration behind her, and Disappeared.

"Mother?"

Draco fought to keep calm. He'd left Alexander and Zahira with a hurried apology and Disappeared home. And of course she wasn't there. Nor was she at the shop. Or The Burrow, where he'd sent Molly Weasley into a panic at Hermione's disappearance.

He then Flooed straight to the Manor — which should have been his first stop, since his mother was Granger's confidante.

"Mother, are you here?" He sniffed the air, frowning at the lack of Hermione's scent. His parents were home, but it didn't appear that she was with them.

He found them in the solarium, his father flipping through the latest edition of the new Daily Prophet and his mother reading something that looked oddly similar to the book Granger had been reading the previous week.

"Draco?" Narcissa smiled at him. "This is a lovely—"

"Is Hermione here?"

"No, darling. We've not seen her. Did something happen?"

"We went to Alexander and Zahira's to see if they could shed some light on this bonding and it didn't go well." Draco sniffed the air again. *Where the hell was she?*

Lucius folded the newspaper and dropped it onto the side table. "She's disappeared?"

"Yes. She Disapparated when—" he growled in frustration. "Where the hell is she!?"

"Why did she disappear?" His mother's face became stern. "Did they upset her?"

"Not intentionally," Draco said. "They were explaining how they bonded. Zahira being a Beta, they needed a potion that essentially turned her into an Omega for a few hours and Hermione was horrified and had a fit."

"I don't blame her," Lucius said and Draco glanced at him in surprise. "She's an Alpha. Why should she be expected to lower herself to enable a bonding?"

"I'm not sure she even has to." Draco threw his arms in the air. "She stormed out before we could discuss it. She wasn't at home or the shop. I even went to The Burrow."

"Home?" Narcissa's lips twitched. "You consider her house your home?"

"I think we have more pressing matters right now, Mother, than where I consider my home to be."

"Of course, darling." Narcissa flicked her eyes quickly to Lucius, and Draco didn't miss the looks of glee on both their faces.

"You can decorate the nursery later, Mother," Draco said with a roll of his eyes. "Right now I just need to find her."

"What are you feeling right now?" Lucius asked.

"How do you think I'm feeling?"

"Draco!" His father stood and crossed the room, stopping directly in front of him. "What is it you're feeling? *Right now?* You've no idea where she is, how does that make you feel?"

Draco clenched his jaw. *How the fuck did his father think it made him feel?*

She was missing. Disappeared to who knew where. He was pissed off. He was fuming that she left the way she did. He was hurt that she didn't wait for him. He was desperate to know where she was. He was ching with not knowing where she was. He was...

"I feel lost," he finally admitted. "I thought I was angry at her, but I'm not. I just need to know she's okay."

"As I suspected." Lucius gripped his shoulder. "The bond has already begun. Your magic is searching for her and causing you distress because it cannot find her."

"Would she be feeling the same?" Draco asked.

"It's possible, but her anger is probably masking the effect." Lucius took a breath. "And she has every right to be angry. The assumption she would have to become submissive to you for this bond to work is correct. Unfortunately submission is what all of this is about."

"Lucius?" Narcissa looked questioningly at him. "Do you know something?"

Lucius shook his head. "I'm not sure. It didn't make sense that Molly and Arthur could just adopt her to make this work. It wouldn't change her lineage—"

"Father," Draco warned.

"It wouldn't change anything, Draco. She is Muggleborn. And I don't say that as an insult — it's simply a fact. A pureblood family adopting her won't change that." Lucius stepped away to pick up his wand, *Accio-ing* a book from his den. "I've been reading all I can find regarding female Alphas, and while there's not much to go on, her being a Muggleborn isn't what's stopping this."

"You found something?" Draco didn't dare to hope.

"Maybe." Lucius flipped open the book. "In all cases of Alpha-Omega and Alpha-Beta bondings, the Alpha takes control—"

"Yeah, we already know that," Draco snarked.

"If you would let me finish." Lucius shot him a look of contempt. "In the *male* Alpha world, it's all about control and dominance, but the male Alpha holds his mate in the highest regard. It is only during the magical bonding that she submits to him. It appears that at all other times, she is the one in control."

"But an Omega is in danger of other males capturing her," Narcissa pointed out. "If she is in control, it's not until after the bond has occurred. Before that, she's a mindless mess."

Lucius shook his head. "No. An Omega is surprisingly sharp. The only time her mind is a mess is when her heat occurs and she's unbonded. And that's rare. An Omega is usually already paired before she changes."

"I'm not getting how this helps our situation," Draco said. "Hermione isn't an Omega."

"Contrary to the egos of the male Alpha, the female party in all of these scenarios has the power. Omegas and Betas alike. She decides who she wants her mate to be. She decides when it's time to be bonded. She is the one who allows the male to claim her. If the female didn't want to be bonded, she wouldn't be."

"But Tessie Prewett went insane because she refused," Narcissa said. "I don't see how you think that's having the power."

"Ah, but she did have the power. She *chose* not to be bonded. Yes, she went mad, but she still made the decision. She refused to conform and would not allow a bonding."

"This isn't making any sense!" Draco cried in frustration. "Hermione has decided that I'm her mate, she has decided it's time for us to be bonded, and it still hasn't worked!"

"Because neither of you submitted to the other," Lucius said calmly. "Because that's what this is all about. Submission. It's not about dominance, although that plays its part. But since you're both Alphas, you *both* have to be submissive."

"That makes no sense." Draco was shaking his head. "I allowed her to bite me, she allowed me to bite her. That would be submission."

"Clearly it wasn't." Lucius shrugged. "It might be a case of having to perform the pureblood ceremony first. And then you will have to figure a way that you are both submitting at the same time. I've no idea how you'll do it, but it seems to be the most logical scenario."

"Well, none of it matters right now when there's no female Alpha to be seen." Draco pressed his fingertips to his forehead, a dull ache was beginning to form behind his eyes. "I assumed she would be here."

"It is possible that she needed the comfort of her friends this time." Narcissa gave Draco a rueful smile. "Thinking she has to be less than you would have brought up some quite nasty memories for her. And this house — and this family — would have been among some of the worst times for her."

"I don't even understand why she chose me," Draco said quietly.

"Because you are her equal," Lucius replied. "You are both intelligent and talented and have an unwavering respect for each other. And, despite your colourful past, she knows that you are loyal only to her."

"Yeah, well, I'm not going into that coven. They'll rip me apart." Draco grimaced, remembering the girls' reactions to him and his treatment of Hermione at the start of all this.

"I don't think she's with the girls." Narcissa called for Keely, asking her to collect hers and Lucius' coats. The elf returned in seconds and wished the Malfoys well.

"And we're going where?" Draco enquired.

Narcissa smiled and indicated the floo. "Grimmauld Place."

Chapter End Notes

As always, much thanks for sticking with this. I'm doing my best to keep up and hopefully with life a bit more settled, updates will continue fortnightly

Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)



"Malfoy? What—?"

"Is she here, Potter?" Draco stepped out of the Floo and found himself face to face with his two school rivals and their wives. But he wasn't in the mood for any shit from any of them.

"Harry." His mother appeared out of the Floo behind him, smiling at the surprised expression on Potter's face. "Sorry to interrupt your weekend, but it appears we have a lost Alpha."

"She's not with you?" Potter asked. "We assumed she'd be there by now. We were actually just on our way over."

"Unfortunately, no." Narcissa sighed as the Floo lit up again and Lucius stepped into the room. "She seems to have completely disappeared."

"I'm assuming that Hermione is not here then?"

"No." Harry shook his head.

"We've not seen her either," Ron said. "Mum came to mine and Daph's in a panic, then we came here."

Draco sniffed the air and his jaw clenched. They weren't lying, she wasn't there, but her scent was still on Weasley. Much fainter now, but she was still there. He sneered, but Ron was having none of it.

"Don't start your Alpha shit, Malfoy." Ron was furious. "This is all your fault."

"You don't even know what happened, Weasley." Draco balled his hands into fists.

"Oh, you're gonna hit me?" Ron stepped closer to him. "Go on. Hit me. Be a big Alpha and whack me one."

Daphne grabbed Ron's arm. "Don't provoke him. I prefer you in one piece."

"Nah," Pansy drawled. "I think Weasley is pissed off enough. He could take Malfoy."

"How about we all calm down?" Lucius suggested, stepping between the two men.

"What did you do, Malfoy?" Ron glared at him, ignoring Lucius.

"Contrary to what you believe, Weasley, I did nothing."

"They went to see Alexander," Narcissa began to explain. "About the bonding. Hermione became upset when Zahira explained that they used a potion to enable an Alpha-Beta bonding."

"That doesn't sound that bad," Daphne said.

"It basically turned Zahira into an Omega." Draco winced at their shocked faces.

"Yeah, I'm surprised you can still reproduce," Pansy said in disgust.

"This wasn't my suggestion. It was them. What *they* had to do. Granger doesn't need a potion or to turn into an Omega. And I don't fucking want her to!" Draco yelled in exasperation then shook his head. "Where the hell is she? You must know."

"We might know." Harry glanced at Ron, who shook his head.

"He's not coming with us," Ron said firmly. "He's staying here."

"And do you really think you can stop me, Weasley?"

"Absolutely." Ron laughed and moved closer to him. "Do you actually think I'm stupid enough to believe you'll hurt me? Hermione *will* render you unable to reproduce if you do. You might be her Alpha, her one and only mate, but we're her best friends. And right now she needs *us*. Me and Harry — the people who were there for her when you were treating her like she was a piece of worthless crap." Ron stepped closer still. His head barely came up to Draco's shoulder, but he refused to back down. "If you show up with us, she'll Disapparate again and no one will find her. So sit your fucking arse down and wait."

The crunch of Draco's knuckles was loud in the silence, but Ron didn't flinch. Draco closed his eyes and let out a slow breath. When he opened them again, Daphne's gasp let him know his eyes had changed. But he also knew they weren't the black storm of anger. His mate was missing and his control was wavering. He wasn't angry; he was completely distraught.

He'd not been prepared to feel this way, totally lost and pining for someone who was barely on the edge of his circle of friends just a few months ago. His father had been right. Their bond *had* begun. His magic was reaching for her but couldn't find her, and it was causing a deep ache that was almost painful.

He could feel the tears stinging the backs of his eyes but he wouldn't let them fall. Not in front of Potter and Weasley.

"Oh, Draco." Daphne didn't hesitate, shoving Ron aside and placing her hand on his arm. Pansy did the same and his mother's hand landed gently between his shoulder blades.

"They'll find her, Draco," Daphne told him quietly. "Harry and Ron, you can trust them. You know you can."

"She's their friend," Pansy added. "You know that. They only want her safe, the same as you do."

"Draco, darling, they simply wish to help her. You need to let them."

Draco shook his head, the dazed feeling lifted and he stared at the three women. "What did you do?"

"It's a trick we've learned with Hermione. It calms her." Pansy squeezed his arm. "Apparently it works on you too."

"Potter, Weasley." Draco looked at his former school foes. "Please find her."

They both nodded, Ron's face looking slightly guilty, but Draco just shook his head.

"I deserved it, Weasley. Everything you said was right. I just..." He swallowed thickly. "I can't function not knowing where she is."

Lucius gripped Draco's arm and smiled at his son. "We believe the bond has already begun. Their magic has somehow become entwined without them even realising. It's probably why both their emotions are so heightened."

"We'll find her, Malfoy," Ron assured him. "I don't know what she sees in you, but I trust her judgment."

Draco huffed out a laugh of thanks and Harry and Ron headed for the door.

"Mr Potter. Mr Weasley." Lucius held up his hand stopping their departure. "I may have figured out a solution to the problem, if she still wants the bonding to go ahead."

Ron nodded. "She's just stubborn. And all of this has made her worse. She'll come back, Draco. If she's as lost without you as you are without her, she'll come back."

Hermione leaned back against the tree and watched as a small girl rode her pink bike along the path, her father following behind her. She wobbled along, the training wheels stopping her from toppling over, and she was squealing excitedly.

Look, Daddy. I can do it!
I can see, sweetheart. I'm so proud of you.

A single tear rolled down Hermione's cheek. Her own father had brought her to this park to learn to ride her bike. He had followed along behind her, laughing and clapping, telling her how proud he was.

Her father. The man who no longer remembered her. The man who would have hugged her and told her everything would be alright.

But, he wasn't here to tell her that. Or tell her anything. It broke her heart every time she needed to talk to him. He had always been the person she talked to. He'd been the one who would listen to her constant chatter and, no matter how busy he was, would always make time for her. He'd accepted she was a witch without question — her mother had been shocked and in denial for quite some time — and he was as interested in the magical world as Hermione was.

Her father had always told her she was special, but she'd always rolled her eyes and told him that he *had* to say that. But she knew, without a doubt, that her father would now tell her how right he'd been. Her Alpha status wouldn't have even surprised him.

The little girl squealed again, her father plucking her from the bike and swinging her in the air. Her little arms went around his neck and he hugged her with such love Hermione had to look away.

She'd become accustomed to her parents not being around, but right now she missed them with such sadness her heart ached. She needed them. Needed their reassurances once more that everything would work out perfectly.

Curling her knees to her chest, she seemed to crawl deeper into herself. She thought this would have ended — the crazy emotions — but, once more, she'd become completely overwhelmed over something that wasn't even relevant. She knew her situation was different to Zahira's. She was an Alpha; she didn't need to take a potion to enable changes so a bonding could occur, but just the thought had enraged her. And she couldn't stop her anger from bursting out.

And her anger, it seemed, was the one thing she was still unable to control. Her other emotions had calmed, returned to normal, but her anger had a life of its own. When stirred, it was like a small bubble inside her that continually expanded until it exploded in rage. Her attempts to tamp it down only seemed to make it worse. And nothing she tried had helped. Slow breathing, counting to ten, imagining a calm ocean. It was all a crock of shit. None of it could stop the bubble once it began to brew.

"Hermione?"

Her head snapped up at the sound of Ron's voice. Harry was standing beside him, both of them looking at her with familiar expressions of concern.

Her eyes stung and the tears she'd be holding in finally rolled down her cheeks. "How did you find me?"

They both moved to sit on either side of her. Ron took her hand and linked his fingers with hers, Harry curled his arm through hers and kissed her temple.

"You told us this is your most favourite place," Harry said. "Your dad used to bring you here all the time."

"Yeah," Hermione sobbed. "I miss him. Both of them, but my dad..." She choked on the word.

"We know," Harry whispered and shifted his arm to circle her shoulders, pulling her close. "This has all been so much for you."

"You should have talked to us, Hermione," Ron said gently. "All the shit we've been through together means we're *always* together. In everything."

"I know." She squeezed his fingers and lay her head on Harry's shoulder. They stayed that way for a long while, Hermione knowing they were both waiting for her to explain her thoughts to them.

This was how it had always been — solidarity between them. Their friendship had been forged in the craziest of circumstances, but since that day, nothing could come between them. They'd had their disagreements, but they had always returned to each other.

And that was why they were sitting beneath a tree on the cold dirt with her now.

"I've been trying to control my anger, but it's the one thing I can't seem to hold down," she finally said. "Hannah told me when this all started that I should control the little things, which I've succeeded in. But this... my anger, it just gets away from me and I can't stop it."

"Maybe you should stop fighting it," Harry suggested. "Maybe it's something you need to allow to happen. Just let it all out and be angry."

Hermione laughed. "Maybe. But I don't think that's very constructive."

"I don't think that's what it's about." Ron squeezed her hand. "I think this is about you. Not your anger."

"How is it any different? My anger and me seem to be a package deal."

"Do you promise not to get angry at me?" Ron asked.

"I promise to try," Hermione answered. "It depends on what you're about to say."

"I think part of it comes down to bonding with Malfoy," Ron began holding up his hand at her protest. "I don't mean it like you think. I don't mean you should bow down to him, or any man, for that matter. But the changes have already started. A few months ago you couldn't even be in the same room as me, and now you're sitting beside me without wanting to vomit."

"I still want to vomit," Harry joked, making Hermione giggle.

"Feeling's mutual, mate," Ron told him, then continued with his theory. "The bond between you has already begun; everyone can see it. He's completely smitten with you, and since he's still... scenting?" He looked at her for confirmation that was the right phrasing. She nodded and he went on. "He can still scent you on me, so I think that means you haven't quite let go of me. And I think that's why there's a conflict."

"I let go of you years ago." Hermione scowled. "You're married, Ron, and I don't have any of those feelings for you."

"I know that, but you still feel protective of me. And Harry—"

"Draco couldn't scent Harry. He knows he's my friend. And he should know that about you," Hermione protested.

"I know, and I'm not saying this to make you angry. I'm just telling you what I think," Ron said. "And what I think is that you're too concerned with pleasing everyone to put yourself first. You need to allow yourself to be this. Be the Alpha. You haven't allowed that yet. We've seen glimpses of it, but you are holding something back. And I think what you're holding back is you."

"He's right," Harry agreed. "You're holding yourself back. The anger — and please don't hate me here — is easy to hide behind."

"You think I'm hiding behind my anger?" Hermione looked at them both in turn and they nodded. "That's ridiculous."

"Is it?" Ron lifted her hand to his lips and kissed it. "Listen, you've always been there for us. You've saved our arses more times than we care to count, and I'm sure neither of us would be here if it wasn't for you. That alone makes you so incredible, but it also makes you forget that you're as important as we are."

"Hermione, when was the last time you did anything just for you?" Harry asked, but she knew he already knew the answer.

"I have my shop," she said weakly.

"That's not for yourself," Ron chided. "That's so you don't starve."

Hermione let out a small laugh. "Yeah, I suppose."

"So, let yourself have this." Harry tightened his arm around her shoulders. "Be the Hermione Granger we know you are. You don't have to submit to Draco, he doesn't want you to anyway —"

"You spoke to Draco?"

"We did." Harry nodded. "Well, Ron almost punched him, but yeah. He's at the house right now."

"Grimmauld Place?" Hermione shook her head in disbelief. "He's at your house?"

"So are Narcissa and Lucius," Ron added.

"What!?"

"They're worried about you," Harry explained. "Draco is... I've never seen him like it before. He's lost, Hermione. Not knowing where you are is driving him completely mad."

"I didn't think." She shook her head. "I was so angry and just left. I didn't think about him."

"And you didn't have to," Ron said. "This is what I meant. You can't think about him right now. You need to work out why you can't get past this anger thing before you go worrying about him again."

"But if he's upset—"

"No," Ron said firmly. "He's just throwing a tantrum of his own. He'll be fine."

"You've talked to the girls about all of this, but you've not said anything to us," Harry said, sounding a little hurt. "Tell us what's been happening. How you feel. Not how Draco — or

anyone else — makes you feel."

"I don't know," She huffed and they both groaned.

"You do know, Hermione." Ron sounded exasperated. "Just tell us. Whatever you feel, just tell us."

Hermione dropped his hand and pressed her fingers to her eyes. She sat quietly for a few beats and then finally she told them. "I feel frustrated. Like there's all these expectations on me and I don't want any of it."

A small sob escaped her and Ron shifted closer to her. Harry's arm tightened around her once more.

"I didn't ask to be this. I shouldn't even be this." She dropped her head back to Harry's shoulder. "I'm not pureblood. I'm not special—"

"Hermione, you are—"

"No! I'm not special. I'm not more important than anyone else. I didn't do anything more than any other member of the Order." She took a breath. "I've had to work harder because of what I was seen as. A Mudblood. I've had to work hard to prove myself, and that just made everything even harder. I was considered a swot, a loud-mouthed know-it-all, and no one saw it as a good thing. They all just saw me as less than them."

"And there it is." Ron squeezed her knee. "You still see yourself as less. But you're not. You are so far from being less than anyone. All of those people who thought so have changed their minds. And you did that. You made them see who you really are. And in case you haven't noticed, the family who was one of the biggest opponents of Muggleborns has now welcomed you into their family. And their son is distraught that he can't find you. I don't think that makes you less than anyone."

"I think that puts you in complete control," Harry said. "You just have to let yourself believe it."

"How do I do that?"

A loud squeal had them all looking down the slope to where the little girl raced towards them. She stopped in front of them and frowned at Hermione. "Are you sad?"

"I'm a bit sad, yes." Hermione smiled at the little girl. "But my friends are here to cheer me up."

"Emeline! Leave those people alone!" the father called, running over and apologising for the interruption.

"Your name is Emaline?" Hermione asked and the girl nodded. "That's a very strong name."

"I *am* strong." She puffed out her chest. "I rode my bike all by myself."

"I saw you. You did a wonderful job."

"Come on, sweetheart." The girl's father lifted her up and apologised again. All three of them waved his apology away, and Hermione watched as he carried her back down the slope to where her pink bike waited.

"Emaline," Hermione murmured.

"Do you know her?" Ron was watching as the father and daughter rode off.

"No." Hermione shook her head. "But Emaline was the name of the first ever female Alpha."

"Well, if she was as feisty and confident as that little girl, I think the signs are good for you," Harry said.

"That's what I was thinking," Hermione agreed.

"Are you ready to go back then?" Ron asked, standing and brushing off his trousers.

"I am," she said with a nod, taking his offered hand.

Ron pulled her to her feet and Harry stood beside them.

"You don't have to be what's expected. You can bend the rules and be anything you want to." Ron winked at her. "We've been doing that for years."

Draco was out of his seat and standing before the front door even opened. Her scent was heavy, dark, with a burnt aroma that made his heart clench.

What had happened? Why had her scent changed?

The door squeaked open and footsteps sounded in the hallway. It took everything he had to not rush out of the living room and engulf her.

Potter entered first, smiling, which Draco took as a good sign. Weasley followed, holding her hand, and Draco winced.

He's married to Daphne.

They're just friends.

It means nothing.

"Hermione, darling." Narcissa stood and greeted her. "Are you alright?"

She nodded and Draco breathed a sigh of relief.

"Sorry," she whispered and Draco was in front of her in a flash.

Wrapping his arms around her, he lifted her from the floor, whispering her name over and over. She flung her arms around his neck and buried her face into his shoulder, a wracking sob hiccupping out of her.

Up close, the burnt aroma was stronger. There were no traces of her usual warm scent and he was worried about what might have happened.

"Are you okay?"

"I am now." She breathed him in. "I'm sorry I ran off."

"You came back. That's all that matters." He held her tighter.

"Harry and Ron..." She lifted her head to look at him.

"I know. I'm glad they found you." He smiled at her. "I'm not glad I'm now in their debt."

Hermione smiled, but Draco saw that it didn't reach her eyes. Something was still wrong and it was bothering her to the point of changing her scent.

He lowered her to the floor and cupped her face. "We'll work this out... that's if you still want to."

"I do, but..." She glanced around the room, then lowered her voice. "I won't become an Omega for you."

"I don't want you to, and you don't have to. Father may have worked something out."

"Really?" Hermione turned to Lucius who stood and offered his seat to her.

"It's not a definite solution, just a theory," Lucius explained.

Hermione sat and Draco stood behind her, his hands going to her shoulders, the need to touch her overwhelming in its intensity. She'd been gone for just a few hours and his nerves had been wrecked.

A few hours. If it had been longer, he wasn't sure what would have happened. The thought of it, of her being gone from his life, caused a tremor to course through his body. He knew he wouldn't cope if he lost her.

"I think the bonding between you has already begun," his father said. "Your magic appears to have become intertwined. I can't say how this has occurred, but Draco's devastation at not knowing your whereabouts tells me that his magic was searching for its mate. Did you feel anything while you were gone?"

Hermione nodded. "I did, but..." She tilted her head back to look up at Draco. "I think I was ignoring it. Not intentionally, just... I was so mad, I didn't recognise what it was."

Draco leaned down and kissed her forehead. "And that's okay. You had every right to be mad."

"Not really," she disagreed. "I should have stayed and listened to what Zahira had to say."

"I don't think it would have mattered," Luicus said. "An Alpha-Beta pairing is completely different. As is an Alpha-Omega one. A Beta has to use a potion to enable gland enlargement for the blood bond. And an Omega has to have a heat for the same reason. But two Alphas have no need for such things."

"But we tried the blood bond. It didn't work." Hermione sighed. "Maybe I should just take the fucking potion and be done with this."

"Hey now!" Ron pointed a finger at her. "What did we tell you?"

She simply looked at him and shrugged.

"What did you tell her?" Pansy asked.

"That she needs to allow herself to be the Alpha she is," Ron replied.

They all looked at him like he was insane.

"You've not been able to spend time with her because of the scent issue," Narcissa said. "But I assure you, Mr Weasley, Hermione has very much been an Alpha."

"Outwardly, yes," Ron agreed. "But the subconscious lack of belief in herself, that she doesn't believe she's equal, has been holding her back. Look around the room. There's one Muggleborn here. Harry is half-blood, and the rest of us are pureblood. The ratio is stacked unfavourably, wouldn't you say?"

"Even our group of friends is mostly pureblood. Hannah is half-blood, but Neville, Ginny and Nikolai, the rest of The Weasleys are all pureblood," Harry added. "So everyone around her has magical origins that they knew about. Hermione doesn't. And she's had to prove herself over and over again to everyone."

"Hermione, we didn't realise." Daphne looked apologetically at her.

"Neither did I," Hermione admitted. "Ron pointed it out. I guess I'm still trying to prove that I belong here."

Draco moved to squat beside her chair. "Granger, Darling, never again do you have to have to prove anything. You are a witch and a brilliant one at that. Your origin is no longer relevant."

"It seems we are still causing you a great deal of stress, Hermione." Lucius bowed his head. "I don't think we can ever suitably apologise for how we treated you."

"You welcomed me into the Malfoy family, Lucius. I think you've accepted who I am."

"Yes, but the feeling of inferiority is still holding you back, and that is something that we are responsible for."

"No, it's not that." Hermione dropped her eyes to her lap. "I've been scared."

"Oh, darling." Narcissa reached for her hand. "Whatever of?"

"Of failing. Of not meeting the expectations of being an Alpha. Of not knowing what the hell I'm supposed to do." Hermione looked up, and the sympathy on all their faces brought tears to her eyes again. "Most days I feel like I have a grasp on it all, then it all falls away because something annoys me. And I try to fight it, try to control it, but it never works. And it feels like I'll never be able to."

"And we've been pushing you." Draco took her other hand. "We've been treating you like a male Alpha. We've just assumed you were the same. I'm so sorry."

"I guess it just takes more time," Pansy said. "And we'll be here to help you through it, you know that."

"I feel so useless," Hermione told them. "I feel like this is something I should have no issues with. I have no problems telling people to get out of my shop, or to mind their business, but if I get truly upset, I can't fight it. It makes no sense. Why is it only my anger that's the problem?"

"It's not a spell or a charm," Daphne spoke gently. "And it's not something you have been able to research because there's nothing known about this. You shouldn't be beating yourself up over it."

"And Draco is right," Pansy said. "We have been treating you like a male Alpha and we shouldn't have. Obviously it's not the same thing."

"It still doesn't explain why I can't control this one aspect, though. And it doesn't explain why the blood bond failed."

"Well, I think Mr Weasley was on to something," Lucius said with a nod towards Ron. "From the small amount of information I have been able to find, I believe this isn't about dominance. It's about submission."

"So I *do* have to submit to him?" Hermione clenched her jaw.

"It's okay." Draco lifted their joined hands and kissed the back of hers. "It's not what you think. Hear him out."

Hermione nodded, somewhat reluctantly, then turned back to Lucius.

"As I was saying, I believe this is about submission. Betas submit, as do Omegas, but their submission is their own choice. Even Omegas. Their heats render them somewhat incoherent, but it's only during those few days. And usually, she has chosen a mate before her first heat." Lucius paused momentarily allowing Hermione to take in what he'd said. "And Betas don't have any of the issues that Omegas have. In fact, a Beta is usually the one who makes the

choice, and from what I've read of the pairings, several Alphas were rejected before finding their Beta mate."

"Really?" Hermione was intrigued. "But how?"

"I assume no differently than a woman rejects the advances of a man today." Lucius chuckled. "And that's where the submission comes in. The Beta and Omega do submit, there's no getting around that, however, the Alpha isn't *just* dominant. They must also be submissive. They must let their mate know that she — or he — is their one and only. And I think that's what needs to happen here. But, after what Mr Weasley has suggested, I think there might be more to it."

"Ron." Hermione looked at her friend.

"Me." Ron nodded.

"Ron said I hadn't let go of him." Hermione glanced quickly at Daphne. "I have, he's married to you and I would never—"

"I know," Daphne assured her. "But you're still friends."

"And it's also because she won't allow herself to accept that she's brilliant, and talented, and equal," Ron said, his eyes never leaving Hermione's.

"And she won't allow herself to let go of her concern for everyone around her. She's too preoccupied with ensuring we're all happy and forgets about herself." Harry crossed his arms over his chest and stood beside Ron.

"Some friends you two are." Hermione stared back at them.

"Granger, they're right," Draco said. "I never thought I'd say that, but they are. Darling, they're your friends and they always will be, but you are so concerned with keeping them safe, you forget about yourself. They need you, but they only need you as their friend now, not their protector."

"It's true," Harry agreed. "Ron already said that if it wasn't for you we probably wouldn't be alive, but we're okay. We're safe now. Thanks to you."

"We do still need you," Ron said. "But we also need you to shine like we know you can."

Tears filled her eyes and she rose from her seat, moving to where they both stood. She grabbed them both and flung her arms around their necks. They hugged her back, both telling her everything would be alright.

"You're exhausted." Draco spoke quietly as he touched her shoulder.

He had been watching her since they left Grimmauld Place. She'd been quiet, lost in her thoughts, since their return home. She'd been sitting on the window seat, staring out into the back garden long after the sky had grown dark while he simply watched her and fretted.

She turned from the window and smiled sadly. "Yeah, I guess I am. But it's still early."

"Doesn't matter," he said and held out his hand. She took it willingly and he helped her to her feet.

"You smelled different," Draco blurted. "When you came back, your scent was burnt and heavy. What happened?"

"I was missing my parents, and I was so confused." She wrapped her arms around him and leaned her head against his chest. "I was at a Muggle park. There was a little girl learning to ride her bike, and her father was with her, cheering her on. It brought back memories of my dad doing the same thing with me."

Draco folded his arms around her tightly and pressed his cheek to the top of her head. "I'm so sorry they're not here. And I'm sorry I didn't make it any easier on you. None of us did."

"None of you knew." She looked up at him. "I didn't know."

"It doesn't make it right." He kissed the tip of her nose. "But let's not talk about it now. You're exhausted. We'll sleep on it and talk about it tomorrow."

She nodded and he Apparated them to the bedroom.

"Let me shower quickly. The scent of Ron and Harry on me must be driving you insane."

Draco shook his head. "It's maddening, but you need it. You calmed immediately when you were with them, and you've remained calm since."

"But Draco, you hate—"

"You need it more." He kissed her and leaned his forehead on hers. "And this is what they were telling you. Stop thinking of me. You need them near you right now and I'll just have to deal with it. We both have some things to learn, it seems."

She looked down at herself and transfigured their clothes into sleepwear. Draco caught her as she stumbled sideways, scooping her up and shaking his head.

"To bed, Granger. You're more than exhausted."

He laid her on the mattress before crawling beside her and pulling the covers over them. She curled into his side, wrapping her arm around him and laying her head on his chest.

"Thank you," she murmured quietly. Then even more quietly, "I love you."

Draco sighed, relieved, and pressed a kiss to the top of her head. "I love you, too, Granger."

Chapter End Notes

I was always told it is polite to say 'thank you.'

So.. THANK YOU to everyone for reading my work and leaving kudos and comments.
It's much appreciated xx

Chapter 25

Draco woke and instantly felt her distance. His eyes flew open and he turned to look at her, rolling to his side and feeling no small amount of relief when he saw she was still sleeping peacefully beside him.

She was on her stomach, her arms hugging the pillow tightly. His heart clenched and he squeezed his eyes closed, thoughts of her not being beside him flashing through his mind.

What if she'd changed her mind?

What if she hadn't come back?

What if she'd decided he was a total arse?

He wasn't sure he'd survive. His entire being belonged to her. He knew it — *felt it* — he would submit to her a thousand times if he thought it would bind them together.

He just didn't know how to translate that into the blood bond.

How *did* they both submit? And hadn't they already? They wanted to be together. Their magic had already begun to bond. They sensed each other's presence before even seeing one another.

He couldn't imagine what else they would need to do.

A small sigh sounded from her and he smiled. She was still asleep, her slow, easy breaths belying the angst of the day before. He brushed a wayward curl from her face. She was stunningly beautiful, and he cursed himself — not for the first time — for not seeing it sooner. He'd let his prejudices cloud his vision and he'd not allowed himself to see the incredible woman that she was.

Kissing her gently, he slipped out of the bed. As much as he wanted to wake her and talk, she needed to sleep. The last few months had been exhausting for her — not that any of them had realised — and for now, talking could wait.

He closed the bedroom door and moved quietly down the hallway to the bathroom, closing that door as well. Huffing out a laugh, he shook his head at his actions. Just a few months ago he wouldn't have cared about a woman sleeping down the hallway. In fact, she would have already been asked to leave.

But this woman...

She'd changed him.

Hermione Granger had changed Draco Malfoy. And changed him for the better.

But he'd still - unconsciously - been discounting her feelings, expecting her to come to terms with things the way a male Alpha would.

Draco stepped into the shower, closing his eyes and letting the water wash over him. The previous day had been difficult. Even more so for her. She'd been through more than he'd realised — a great deal of it caused by him — and she was still dealing with it all. He couldn't even imagine how he would cope if he'd had to wipe his own existence from his parents' minds. Or if he hadn't grown up knowing he was a wizard.

Or if he'd been treated the way he treated her.

He would have given up — would have walked away and pretended the magical world didn't exist.

But he was a coward. She wasn't.

She'd held her head high through all the taunting, all the rude and uncalled for remarks, all the hatred. She'd stood up for what was right. And through it all, she'd still managed to achieve the highest academic accolades possible.

She wasn't merely equal. She had surpassed everyone around her.

Her scent had his head snapping up as the bathroom door opened.

"Draco?" Her voice was filled with concern. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah," he said, mentally chastising himself. Despite tiptoeing around, he'd still woken her. "Sorry I woke you. I was trying to be quiet."

She was silent for a few seconds before stepping into the shower with him, clicking the door shut and enclosing them in their own little world.

"You were being quiet." She reached up and touched his temple. "It was your mind and your magic that woke me."

Draco frowned. "My mind?"

Hermione nodded. "You were thinking very loudly."

"You could hear me? When did you learn Legilimency?"

"I didn't. I think it's this bond that's begun. We may not have gotten the biting thing right, but my magic definitely recognises yours." She ducked her head under the water. "I'm assuming your magic is the same. Lucius said he thought it was searching for me yesterday and couldn't find me, and I agree. I think that's why you felt so lost and why I was so angry."

"I thought you were angry because of the Omega thing."

"That set it off... this time... but I think I've been so focused on how to make this bonding work that I didn't even realise it had already started."

"I didn't either. Not until Father pointed it out." He reached for the shampoo and handed it to her. "And I will admit, I've been confused about why I feel so strongly for you so quickly."

"In fairness, I've been feeling the same." She smiled at him as she washed her hair. "I mean, I know I want this, but it has been *really* quick."

"Did you want to wait?" Draco asked. "I don't care if you do. You know I'm not going anywhere."

"I do know." She ducked under the water again, rinsing the soapy lather away. "And I don't want to wait. The bond between us has started and it seems that I'm the reason we've not been able to complete it."

"But you didn't know." Draco kissed her forehead. "None of us knew. We all just assumed that Alpha meant the same as *male* Alpha and obviously that's not the case. You feel things very differently and adjusting to everything clearly takes more time. I'm sorry I didn't realise sooner."

"That's not your fault any more than it's mine." Hermione shrugged and shook her head. "I don't want to be this anymore."

"You don't want to be an Alpha?"

"No, I don't want to be scared anymore. I want to be the Alpha I keep telling myself I am. I don't want my emotions to control me. I want to be in control."

She pulled back from him and glanced down. Draco winced; he was rock hard. She was talking about control, but he had about as much control as a Neanderthal.

"I'm sorry. You're being serious and I'm—"

She stopped his words with her fingers, pressing them against his lips. "No, this is perfect. I want to be in control and this is—" She peeked up at him through her lashes, biting her lip nervously. "—I want to..."

She dropped to her knees, her tongue sliding along her lips.

"Granger, you don't have to."

"But I want to." Wrapping her hand around the base of his cock, she smiled up at him. "This is not me submitting to you, Draco. This is just me wanting to watch you like you watch me."

He stared down, still wanting to stop her. It felt like submission to him, and while he knew that was a part of this process, her on her knees after what had happened felt wrong.

"Draco?"

"Hermione, after yesterday, this just seems like you're doing exactly what made you angry."

She shook her head, leaning in to kiss his hip. "This is not me giving in. This is me stepping up. This is me knowing what I want." She lifted his cock and ran her tongue slowly from base to tip. "This is me, Draco Malfoy, not letting anyone or anything control me."

Her tongue slid across his knot, the thickness at the base expanding quickly as she teased him. Draco stroked the side of her neck, smiling at the look of confidence in her eyes. When she'd done this the first time, she'd been tentative — asking what he liked, asking if she was doing it right — but this time, she was letting her instincts take over.

She returned his smile and he felt the tension leave her. Her magic was calm in a way he'd not yet felt. The feeling of not knowing had been all consuming, but this calmness was like nothing he'd ever known. It was a sense of belonging, of knowing that she was his light, that she completed him. His magic had found its home.

"Okay?" she asked and he nodded. She smiled again then closed her eyes, humming quietly against his heavy knot.

Her mouth and tongue continued their tease along his shaft, sparks of pleasure shivering through him as the pad of her thumb traced over the pulsing veins in his cock, then drew circles over the crown, gathering the sticky precum there before sucking her thumb between her lips.

"Fuck," Draco groaned and leaned forward, bracing his hands on the tiles. He wanted her lips around him, wanted to fuck her mouth, but there was no questioning who was in control. And it wasn't him.

Closing his eyes, he gave into her, just letting himself feel. It was what he needed to do. To give in. To submit. To allow her to take control, despite his Alpha ego wanting to dominate her.

He could do this. He could let her take over and suck his cock.

She continued to stroke him, her tongue and teeth and fingers moving and touching him everywhere all at once. He'd had blowjobs and handjobs before, but Hermione Granger on her knees, playing with his cock, was his dream come true.

He groaned and looked down at her, touching his hand to the top of her head as her mouth surrounded his swollen tip. She sucked gently, just her warm lips sliding over him, a blissful moan sounding from her like he was the most delicious thing she'd ever tasted.

She increased the pressure, sucking harder while one hand slid along his shaft and the other caressed his balls. Her head began to bob, her lips moving past the head of his cock to touch the skin below. Moving in tiny back and forth motions, her mouth opened wide to take him in.

"Granger... gods... this is.... *what the fuck!*" He pulled back from her and she grinned up at him.

"What?"

"You shoved your finger in my arse!"

"You didn't like it?" She was biting her lip to stop her laughter.

"Fuck no!" He lifted her to her feet. "Why the hell did you do that?"

"Pansy..." She began to laugh, "Pansy said... guys... and she... Harry... and..."

"Potter likes—nope, I don't want to know." Draco cringed at the image.

"Sorry," she gasped and pressed her forehead to his chest, her entire body shaking with laughter. Draco shook his head and began laughing with her.

"So you just thought you'd try it?"

"Yeah." Looking up at him, her eyes were filled with tears of mirth. "She told me... I should ask... but..."

She snorted and thumped her head back to his chest, her laughter bursting out of her again. Draco kissed the top of her head and wrapped his arms around her, gripping her arse and lifting her to meet his eyes.

"You're mental, you know that?"

Hermione wound her arms and legs around him, still giggling. "I blame Pansy. I wasn't mental until I became friends with her."

"Well, for future reference, I prefer not to have anything shoved in my arse." He turned the water off and stepped out of the shower, walking them down the hallway to the bedroom.

"Draco! We're dripping water everywhere!" Hermione protested, but he ignored her and tossed her onto the bed.

Crawling over her, he grinned. "We can clean up later. Right now, I believe you need to be punished."

He landed a light slap between her thighs and she twisted away from him, pressing her foot against his chest.

"You're the one who needs to be punished. You were a complete jerk to me." She scowled at him, but he simply laughed.

"I was nothing of the sort." He gripped her foot and pressed his thumb to her instep causing her to yelp and wrench her foot from his hand. "You, however, are a sneaky temptress, and you need to be taught a lesson."

"Pfft, as if you could teach me anything." She pounced on him, rolling him backwards and straddling his hips. "I'm the brightest witch of my age. And you were — *are* — always second to me."

"Do you honestly think you can win this game?" Sitting up quickly, he flipped them over, holding her down with his hips. "I'm much bigger and stronger than you. I can make you my own little Omega, if I want."

"You forget that your magic is piss-weak compared with mine."

He cursed as she flicked her wrist and rendered him motionless, flipping them over once more. She smirked down at him, rolling her hips and sliding her wet folds along his length. But her smirk faltered as his body shifted beneath her.

"It seems it's *our* magic now." He gripped her hips and she was on her back again. "I think I'm going to like being bonded to you, Granger. All this magic I can play with..."

He shifted his hips forward, touching the tip of his cock to her wet core. But a surge of magic shot through him and he found himself on his back. He growled in frustration which only made her laugh and pin him down again.

"I'm not sure what the problem is here, Malfoy. You just need to give in. Submit to me and I guarantee you'll enjoy it."

"I've already submitted to you, Granger." He moved to sit up but another bolt of magic hit his chest and held him in place.

"You might have my magic, Malfoy, but I also have yours. And since I was always the more talented one, this just makes me stronger." She leaned down and licked the gland at his throat. "Why are you fighting this?"

"Let me touch you," he growled and immediately lifted his hands to push the wet strands of hair off of her face when she released his arms from the magical hold. "I'm not fighting it. I want to fuck you hard then suck your orgasm out of your cunt."

Her eyes grew wide, the golden hue glowing brightly at his growled words. She sat back up, her hands reaching between them and gripping his cock.

"No," she stated firmly. "You're going to lie there and watch me fuck you." Her eyes never left his as she lifted her hips and touched the tip of him to her centre. "You're going to feel every inch of my... cunt... sliding over you."

Hermione lowered herself onto him, her breath catching as the thick head slipped inside. Her free hand landed on his chest and he covered it with his own, watching her jaw drop and her eyes close at the feeling of him entering her.

She had no idea how stunning she was in that moment, when she took him inside her body, when she had no thoughts in her head other than to just feel. He couldn't think of a moment that she was more beautiful than those few seconds. No tension or stress, or thoughts about who she was supposed to be. She wasn't an Alpha. She was just Hermione.

"Draco..." Her voice was little more than a breath of air and he gripped her hips to steady her. "Gods... I love how you feel inside me."

"I know, Darling." Draco lifted his hips, pushing deeper inside her. The feeling of being joined with her still astounded him. She'd become bolder each time they'd been together like

this. Her hands and mouth had explored, her body had readily accepted his. But this. This one tiny moment when their bodies met was all those feelings he struggled to describe.

She began to roll her hips. Slowly at first, her body stretching and sliding, sucking him deeper. Their combined magic pulsed between them and everything was suddenly heightened. He no longer cared about the show of dominance that had begun between them. Every point where their bodies touched, every breath she took, every sigh and gasp she made while she moved along his cock became his focus.

Lifting off him and sliding back down, he watched her body move with a grace that made this act more like a dance. She moved in a way that wasn't overtly sexual. She was slow and calm, taking her time to feel, to learn, and in doing so, she was easily the most sensual being he'd had the pleasure of knowing.

Her golden eyes stared down at him, her lips moving in a murmur of quiet words; *didn't know... like this... so good... love this... love you.*

One of her hands lifted to cover her breast, the other slid into her hair. Her jaw fell open and her head dropped back. And the most erotic sound imaginable fell from her mouth and filled the room. Her body shuddered and Draco felt the magic holding his chest down vanish. Sitting up, he flipped them over easily. He pulled out of her and quickly slid down her body, his mouth covering her pulsating core and doing exactly what he'd promised; he swallowed her orgasm. She dripped on his tongue, the sweet taste of her pulling a feral growl from deep within his chest. She was *his* woman. *His* Alpha. *His* mate. Her taste belonged only to *him*.

She stilled and he glanced up at her. She was watching him, a dazed glow dancing in her eyes. He knew that look. He'd seen it often enough to know that her release had turned her into a boneless pile of satisfied nothingness.

He kissed her inner thigh, her hip, grazed his teeth along her ribs, pausing to suck on her nipple. Her hand slid lazily into his hair and she murmured his name.

He smiled into her soft flesh, flicking his tongue over her nipple before lifting his head to take her in.

"I think I died." Her voice was still breathy, her skin still warm and damp with sweat.

"Hmm." Draco dragged his tongue across her throat gland. "This warm body says otherwise."

He covered her mouth with his, loving the way her lips felt, the way her tongue played with his. He loved kissing her, loved how responsive — how giving — she was. She surprised and confused him. She was a contradiction of soft and hard, of confident and shy. She was a closed book and completely open all at once.

And he loved her for all of it.

"Draco," she murmured and reached between them, wrapping her hand around him and guiding him to her entrance. "Please..."

She shifted beneath him, raising her hips, and he slid slowly inside her. He groaned. Every fibre of his being wanted to fuck her hard and fast, but he held back. He exhaled slowly, shuddering at the feel of her beneath him, of his cock sinking into her heat.

How was it possible to feel her so differently every time? How could one person consume him so completely?

Closing his eyes, he shifted his hips back then surged forward again and felt her body stretch around him. Her hands slid into his hair and she pressed her face against his neck, her tongue gently flicking out to touch his gland. He groaned, gripping her leg and pulling it along his ribs, sliding impossibly deeper into her.

Her head dropped back to the pillow and he opened his eyes. "Okay?"

She nodded and he began to move. She moved with him, her hips rising and falling with each thrust of his. His mouth went to her throat, tasting her sweet skin and grazing his teeth over the sensitive spot at the base. Her breath hitched and her legs squeezed against him. Her cry was sharp in his ear as he sunk his teeth into her skin.

"Fuck!" he cursed and grimaced. Her blood tasted like... blood. Metallic and rusty.

She stilled and looked up at him. "Nothing?"

He shook his head and wiped his mouth on the back of his hand. "Nothing. You?"

She giggled and squeezed his cock. "Only this."

Draco grinned. "At least you feel something."

"It's more than just something." She rolled her hips, urging him to move again.

And he did.

Shoving aside another failed bonding, he moved over her, in her, feeling her shudder and squirm beneath him. He moved. Faster and faster. Ignoring everything but the woman under him.

He moved.

Sliding through her slick heat until he felt her tighten around him. She cried out, gasping his name, her hands frantically clutching at him.

"Draco! Don't stop. Don't ever stop!"

He moved.

Pumping into her, his arms shuddered and his body burned. His blood pounded in his ears and he gritted his teeth, fighting his Alpha instinct to slam into her hard and lock them together. He didn't want to come inside her. He wanted to pull out and paint her skin with his seed.

"Do it," she whispered and he faltered.

"What?"

"Whatever you're thinking, do it. I want you to."

Her eyes pleaded with him to give in to his crassness and he growled, pulling out of her. His hand flew over his cock, slick with her juices, and within seconds he was shouting his release. They both watched as he came all over her, ropes of thick, white fluid bursting out of him and covering her smooth skin.

"Fucking hell," she breathed and he glanced up at her. "That's a lot."

Draco dropped his head to her shoulder and began to laugh. "You're so completely mental. I love you, you know?"

Hermione grinned as she entered the kitchen. She'd re-showered while Draco cleaned up the water trail they'd left after their first shower, and she'd been surprised to find him now making tea. Leaning her hip on the counter, she watched him carefully fill the two cups in front of him. "Look at you, making tea for me."

"You've taught me well, oh wise one." He laughed and handed her one of the steaming cups.

"Next I'll show you how the microwave works."

"Let's not get too crazy." He kissed her and nodded at the small metal box on the counter. "Muggle magic still confuses me."

"We'll take it slow." She blew a stream of air across the top of her cup, sipping carefully at the steaming liquid. "You know, for two Alphas we're not very bright."

"Meaning?"

"I've been thinking about what your father said, and what Ron said."

"And what conclusions have you drawn?"

"Well, they're both definitely onto something, but I don't think they were *entirely* correct." She crossed the room and sat on the sofa, curling her legs beneath her and sipping her tea.

Draco followed, sitting beside her and stretching his legs out to rest his feet on the coffee table. "What is it you're thinking they got wrong?"

"It's the submission and dominance that's confusing me. We've both submitted to and dominated each other and it's not made any difference to the blood bond. I mean, seriously,

we're both repulsed by it."

He touched the fading bite mark at the base of her throat. "It seems to be the only thing that's repulsing us. Everything else is perfect."

"Perfect is a good description." Hermione curled her hand around his and smiled. "But, I'm guessing this Alpha thing isn't about submission and dominance. I think it's about balance and equality."

"Is that something I'm not doing? I'm sorry if—"

"Draco, no. You've actually been better at it than I have. My emotions have made me a complete bitch at times, and you've just taken it all without complaint."

"I wouldn't say that," Draco disagreed. "I haven't exactly been one hundred percent supportive."

"Not at the start, no," Hermione conceded. "But as soon as you decided what you wanted, your entire demeanour changed."

"This is true. But, what is it you're thinking about all of this?"

"I'm pretty sure it all started that night after dinner, when I got angry at you over that woman. Everything changed then. When we were together that night, it felt like something I couldn't even begin to explain. I knew I wanted you, and only you." She tilted her head and smiled. "Our magic has bonded. You hated not knowing where I was. I hated that woman all over you. I no longer want to vomit when I'm near Ron, and you said it was easier to control yourself around him now. We feel each other's emotions and we calm each other down almost instantly. We don't need a blood bond."

Draco frowned. "Blood is what seals the bond, though."

"Yes, in Alpha-Omega and Alpha-Beta pairings. Lucius was right about that. But, *we're* both Alphas, so I don't think it's needed." She put her tea cup on the table then placed her hand over his heart. "The magic that was mine and the magic that was yours is now combined. Two single entities are now one. You *can* feel it, can't you?"

"I *can* feel it, but... there's something else. It's only small, but it's missing."

Hermione nodded. "I know, but I *think* the bonding ceremony will bring it all together. The physical part is done. Hopefully, the traditional part will finish it."

"So, are you thinking about the family circle ritual?" Draco asked carefully.

"Yeah, but with the parental bond..." She leaned her head on the back of the couch. "It's the one thing I can't figure out."

"I don't think you have to." Placing his cup on the side table, he shifted closer to her. "While you were in your thought bubble yesterday, I also had time to think. Weasley and Potter are your family. You three have been through everything together and the bond that formed only

got stronger when you Obliviated your parents. Potter and Weasley are the family you chose, and that makes the bond between you nearly unbreakable."

"I'm not sure that's enough though," Hermione said with a shrug.

"I think it is." Draco linked their fingers and squeezed her hand. "They were the ones who calmed you. They were the ones who made you see who you are. They're your pack, as it were. And while they both think you need to let them go, I don't believe that's true."

"But that's what's stopping me. My need to constantly protect them both."

Draco shook his head. "I don't think that's it. We don't get a choice when it comes to family, not in the traditional sense. The family we're born into shapes us and makes us who we are. And you did have that with your parents. They taught you to be good and kind and strong. They taught you to protect and love the people who are important to you. And you did that. They needed to be protected... unfortunately that protection was too strong. But that's a part of you." He pressed his hand to her heart. "This, here. This heart of yours. You love the people around you with such fierceness and your need to protect everyone isn't a hindrance, it's a gift. Potter and Weasley are meant to be in your life. Pansy and Ginny and Daphne. Hannah. The Weasleys. That's your chosen family. They're who the Alpha chose. The female Alpha that none of us recognised."

"But, if that was the case, the blood bond would have worked the first time."

Draco shook his head. "No. You were right in saying it's not needed because we've already bonded, we just didn't realise."

"So you don't think we even have to have a ceremony?"

"Oh, we absolutely do. Because that's for you." He lifted their joined hands and kissed the back of hers. "The ceremony will be the last piece of this crazy puzzle, the piece that will make *you* realise that this is your family and your life. It's what you chose, *who* you chose."

"I didn't choose to be an Alpha, though."

"No you didn't, and I think *that's* what's been the hindrance. You've tried to live up to the expectations that come with being an Alpha, but the male version. You're different and unique, and that's what you were meant to be."

"I don't feel different and unique. I feel like a failure."

"But you haven't failed. Not at being a female Alpha, only at being a male one. Which you are most definitely not." Draco winked at her, making her laugh. "You just need to shift your thinking a bit, and if you can do that, you'll shine, just like Weasley said."

"You're very wise today." She shifted closer, curling her legs over his. "First you make tea and now you're being all logical."

"You're a bad influence on me, Granger."

"I could say the same to you, Malfoy. I was all sweet and innocent before I turned Alpha and you could no longer resist me."

"Are you saying I corrupted you?" Draco's hand slid up her thigh.

"You corrupted me in the best possible way." Hermione kissed him, her lips lingering over his. "You opened my eyes to a whole new life."

"Are you ready, Hermione Granger, to live that life?" Draco cupped her cheek and smiled. "Are you ready to believe your chosen family and shine?"

Hermione turned into his touch, closing her eyes briefly and breathing deeply. When she opened them again, her irises were golden.

"I'm ready."

Chapter 26

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Hermione emerged from the Floo, glad of the fact her long-arse day from hell was over. She kicked off her shoes and dropped her bag on the hallway table, closing her eyes and breathing deeply; she didn't want to bring her shitty day home to Draco.

Several expected books hadn't arrived, which meant annoyed customers. And that in turn had meant she'd had several very angry Floo calls with sellers — her Alpha dominance finally shining through. She had refused to back down to their feeble excuses and demanded they come through with the promised books or she would never deal with them again.

Hannah had stood by, watching proudly as she took none of their bullshit.

"Look at you, Ms Alpha," Hannah had said with a grin. "Taking on the world one book vendor at a time."

"I'm working backwards," Hermione had replied. "Take down Dark Lords in my teens, book vendors in my twenties."

Promises of deliveries in the coming days were made and Hermione — doing something she'd never done before — had insisted on Unbreakable Vows to ensure their word was true. But despite the satisfactory resolutions, the day had drained her.

Opening her eyes, she glanced in the large mirror above the hallway table. She looked tired, but that wasn't anything new. The last few months had taken their toll, and even with her new-found confidence, she was still playing catch up.

And now she simply wanted to forget her day and was looking forward to a quiet night in on the couch with a glass of red and her favourite Alpha.

They'd been in their own perfect bubble in the weeks since her meltdown. Agreeing that they *were* moving rather quickly, they'd decided to delay the official ceremony and just be together; their Alpha bond was strong enough and they'd become so attuned to each other the ceremony was almost unnecessary. They would go through with it of course, knowing that it was important to complete the family circle, but for the time being, their bubble of bliss was all they needed.

She moved down the hallway of Draco's flat towards the living area. They had been spending time at both her home and his; an unspoken agreement between them to decide where they would actually live together. His flat was massive, the epitome of luxury with everything one could ever need.

Well, almost.

When they were at her house, she'd noticed him staring out into her garden on more than one occasion, a far away expression and a small smile on his face. When she'd asked him what he was thinking, he'd shaken his head and told her 'nothing'.

But she knew.

Children needed space and the garden — albeit small — was perfect.

They'd not really talked about anything past the ceremony, other than the fact they'd be bound together for the rest of their lives, but children hadn't yet been brought up. And it wouldn't be something she'd bring up tonight. She was too exhausted for anything more than wine and Draco.

But when she entered the living area, she instantly knew something was wrong.

Draco was slumped in the armchair, the top buttons on his shirt open and his tie hanging loosely around his neck. He was holding a whiskey tumbler and his dark eyes were staring into space.

Adrenaline shot through her and her skin broke out in goosebumps. His magic felt as dark as his eyes and anger was rolling off him in waves.

"Draco?"

His head snapped up at the sound of her voice and she crossed the room immediately, squatting beside the chair and touching her fingers to the gland at his throat. He reached up and covered her hand with his and she felt the pull on her own magic.

"What's happened?"

He turned to look at her, his eyes lightening to a dark grey, and she felt the same pull again. She allowed him more, stretching her magic to him and soothing whatever was troubling him.

"Theo," he finally said quietly.

"Theo?" Hermione continued to stroke his skin, feeling his anger rise again at his former friend's name.

He nodded at a scroll of parchment on the coffee table and Hermione frowned.

"Draco—"

"Read it."

She hesitated, not wanting to take her hand away from him, but he gave her a quick smile and she nodded, reaching for the scroll. Unrolling it, she read it quickly, and felt his fingers touching the inside of her wrist as her brows pulled together. He was calming her, stroking her scent gland the same way she'd done it for him, and she understood why.

"Is he serious?"

"Apparently so."

Draco downed his drink and placed the empty glass on the side table. He reached for her again, pulling her onto his lap. She went easily, her own anger was flaring — nowhere near his level, but growing — and their mutual comfort was needed. She leaned her head on his shoulder, her fingers returning to his throat. Draco tilted his head, burying his face in her hair, and she heard him inhale her scent.

Theo was threatening Draco with legal action over, claiming *Unreasonable Dismissal* when Draco fired him. Draco had been 'overly aggressive and unprovoked' and Theo was making a hugely excessive compensation claim. He was well aware of the Malfoy fortune and — as Draco had explained after their run-in at dinner — with his own family fortune sinking faster than a leaky boat, this was his opportunity to return the Nott family to its former glory.

"We know it's a lie, Draco," Hermione said. "You fired him with good reason."

"A broken friendship isn't a good reason."

"No, but directly insulting you is." She lifted her head. "He was out of line. You know he was and you did the right thing."

"It wasn't just me he insulted. It was you as well. That's what made me the angriest. Technically that's why I fired him. Because of you."

"Draco..." She touched his cheek. "We weren't even anything then. Why?"

"Because we *were* something." He lifted her hand and kissed her palm. "In my mind, we were already... not bonded, but I knew we were more, and what he said... I hated him even speaking your name."

"Thank you." She kissed him gently. "You didn't have to do that."

"I did." He ran his hand along her thigh. "I was an asshole to you when we were growing up, Granger, but I've tried to change my ways. He hasn't and still thinks of you as a mud... as that."

"A Mudblood?" Hermione asked. "That's the best he could come up with?"

"Yeah, I'm sorry."

"Don't apologise for him, you did more than you had to. You didn't even know me, not really, and you still defended me." She kissed him again. "When are you meeting with him?"

"The end of the week."

"I'm coming with you."

"You don't have to. Father already has his team of solicitors on it. I'll be fine."

She touched his cheek and spoke firmly. "Draco, I'm coming with you. I'm the reason you fired him and I want to know if he'll say those same things to my face."

"I'm not sure you'll even be allowed in the meeting. I'm not sure our bond would be enough to let you in."

"Trust me, darling." Hermione smiled at him. "There's a way around that."

Draco paced back and forth from the kitchen to the living room window, fidgeting with his tie and pausing to stare out into the garden. He'd been awake before the sun was up and hadn't been able to return to sleep. He'd slipped out of the bed, not wanting to wake Hermione, and had been alternating between drinking tea and coffee for almost three hours.

Hermione had emerged an hour ago, but didn't question his agitated state. She'd simply kissed him good morning and gently caressed his neck, calming him almost immediately. But, his agitation grew once more when she left him to get ready.

He had nothing to be nervous about, he told himself repeatedly. Theo had no idea what he was about to face. In all honesty, he wasn't aware of just how brilliant she truly was.

He tugged on his tie again, pacing back into the kitchen, picking up his now empty coffee mug and scowling. He didn't need any more caffeine; he was hyper enough. He strode back to the window, stuffing his hands in his pockets and staring out. The garden was small, nothing like he was used to from his childhood at the Manor, but he only ever saw his future out there — a future he needed to discuss with Hermione.

He'd never pictured himself as a father; having a child hadn't ever been of any interest for him. But now, with her, it was all he could picture. He was terrified, of course, that two Alphas would produce the next Alpha — be it male or female — and that terror was what had stopped him from asking her what she wanted. To have a child who had to deal with what they both had... he hated the thought.

"If you keep pulling that tie, there'll be nothing left, Draco."

He turned to face her and she was smiling as she approached him. She twisted the knot and straightened the silk.

"You've no reason to be nervous. You know we're ready for him."

"I know." He cupped her face in both hands. "And you are incredible, have I told you that?"

"Under different circumstances you have." She grinned at him. "But this time, I'm just an Alpha helping her mate, that's all."

Draco kissed her, holding his lips against hers for several long seconds. "You've done much more than that, Hermione. Theo will not be expecting any of this. *I* wasn't expecting any of this."

"And that will be his downfall." Hermione touched her palm to his chest. "He doesn't believe a Mudblood is capable of anything."

"Ms Granger, Mr Malfoy."

They were greeted at the offices of Dyer, Duncan, and Drake, by Draco's solicitors. Thomas Fletcher and Isaac James had been the Malfoy family's legal representatives for years, and from what Hermione knew of them, they were two of the best.

"Welcome to the three D's," Isaac said quietly. "Or, as we like to call them, the three Dunces."

Hermione grinned. "They're that bad?"

Thomas nodded. "Three young hotshots, or so they like to think. They've not won a case yet."

"That's a good sign," Draco commented. "Let's not make this their first."

Isaac clapped him on the shoulder. "I don't think that'll be an issue. Not with our secret weapon."

Draco squeezed Hermione's hand. "No, I don't think they'll stand a chance."

Theo's solicitor stood as they entered the meeting room, scowling at Hermione. "Ms Granger's presence is not necessary."

"Actually, as you can see from the documents presented, Ms Granger is a part of Mr Malfoy's legal team." Thomas slid two scrolls across the table.

"She runs a book shop," Theo snorted derogatorily. "What does she know about law?"

"As the documents state, Mr Nott, Ms Granger is still a licensed practitioner of wizarding law. She worked in the Ministry for several years and is still — under wizarding law — permitted to practice if she so wishes." Isaac smiled at Hermione, politely pulling out a chair for her. "She has kept herself updated of all new laws put in place since she left the Ministry and is more than competent to assist in this matter."

Draco sat beside her, the two other men flanking them.

"Do you have any further objections?" Thomas asked smugly.

"Ah... I guess not." Dalton Dyer leaned over to whisper in Theo's ear. Both men were attempting to remain straight-faced but were failing.

Hermione touched Draco's arm. "Have you got...?"

Draco reached into the inside pocket of his jacket and handed Hermione a small vial. She thanked him and set it on the table in front of her. The vial held a silvery puff of smoke and there was no question as to what it was; Draco's memory of the event in question.

Theo's face paled. His version was vastly different from Draco's and Theo had good cause to be concerned.

"If we could get started?" Isaac began. "Mr Nott, the sum you are asking for... half a million Galleons? That's excessive, don't you think? In the four years you worked for Mr Malfoy, you earned a little over eight thousand Galleons per year, which is equivalent to what an Auror earns and quite generous in your field."

"My client doesn't think it's excessive at all," Dalton answered. "He's currently unemployed and is struggling to find work."

"But half a million Galleons — at the yearly rate of pay — equates to approximately sixty-two years of work. I'm sure Mr Nott will find work before he's in his eighties."

"Mr Nott's reputation has been severely damaged by Mr Malfoy. No one will hire him based on that."

"No one?" Thomas asked. "I find that extremely hard to believe." He opened The Daily Prophet to the jobs page. "There's at least... forty job vacancies here, ten of which are for potion makers."

"And to our best knowledge," Isaac added, "Mr Nott's girlfriend is the new classified assistant at The Prophet. I'm sure that gives him an advantage. Ms Farley hasn't had an issue divulging secrets in the newspaper on prior occasions. I'm sure she has no problem letting Mr Nott know of upcoming employment opportunities."

Dalton opened his mouth to speak, but the only sound that came out was a squeak.

"We've worked out a sum that we believe is more appropriate and offer it for your consideration." Isaac slid another scroll across the table.

"Now the matter of the 'unprovoked' attack." Thomas sifted through the papers in front of him, finding the exact document he was after. "'Mr Malfoy came to my flat and physically attacked me without being provoked.' That's what you reported, Mr Nott?"

Theo swallowed thickly, knowing full well what was coming.

"I'll take your silence as a yes," Thomas answered for him then nodded at Hermione. "Ms Granger?"

"Thank you, Mr Fletcher." Hermione said. "Mr Nott, did you at any time during the confrontation with Mr Malfoy refer to me as a 'filthy Mudblood'?"

Dalton squeaked again and glanced at Theo.

"Mr Nott?" Hermione tapped the table impatiently. "Did you or did you not use the derogatory term in reference to my blood status?"

"I... *ah*... don't recall," Theo replied weakly.

Hermione twisted the small vial between her fingers. "We could show you exactly what you said, Mr Nott. Unless you'd like to repeat it now for the record."

"I... I might have," he answered, not meeting her eye.

Isaac slid another scroll towards them. "That's our counterclaim to Mr Malfoy's supposed *unprovoked* attack. I'm extremely surprised your counsel wasn't aware that the language you used is considered, under the nineteen ninety-nine *Granger's Law*, to be of an undesirable nature and is considered a provocation. Mr Malfoy was quite within his rights to defend Ms Granger's name."

Thomas pushed yet another document towards them. "This is our second case against Mr Nott. The breaking of the conversations oath that revealed Ms Granger's Alpha status."

"I wasn't under that oath." Theo sneered at Draco. "You know I wasn't."

Draco turned and smiled at Hermione, "I think my solicitor has a different opinion on that."

"Mr Nott," Hermione began calmly. "Were you at the table when Mr Malfoy and Mr Zabini were discussing me?"

"No, I was at the bar. The oath didn't include me." Theo sat up straight, his cockiness returning.

"When you returned from the bar, did you hear any part of the conversation Mr Malfoy and Mr Zabini were having?"

"Yeah, I heard most of it." He grinned at her. "I thought it was total rubbish, but Draco was adamant about you."

"So you heard Mr Malfoy mention my name? You heard him tell Mr Zabini about my Alpha status?"

Theo's cockiness was short-lived and his grin faltered. "I... *um*... don't recall."

"It seems you don't recall much at all, Mr Nott, but we can assist with that. Mr Fletcher—" Hermione smiled at Thomas "—do you have Mr Zabini's memory of that night?"

"Of course, Ms Granger." He handed her a second vial, which she placed on the table beside Draco's.

"We have two accounts of that night, one from each of your drinking companions. The oath that Mr Malfoy made that night was for the table, not just for the conversation between Mr Malfoy and Mr Zabini. So anything you heard when they were sitting at that table was included in that oath, regardless of whether you were present when it was made or not. The oath covered any mention of my name and any mention of my status at that table. Anyone walking past or approaching that table were also included in that oath."

"That's a stretch," Dalton managed to say, but his expression was one of defeat.

"No, Mr Dyer, that's the law. Laws which your client has knowingly broken simply to further his station in the eyes of Ms Farley. Mr Nott is fortunate that Mr Malfoy didn't add a painful consequence to that oath as had been done on prior occasions when Mr Nott's trust was questionable." Hermione touched the two vials. "Mr Malfoy is willing to drop his cases if Mr Nott is willing to do the same. Otherwise we are quite prepared to take this to the Wizengamot and present our evidence in open court."

Dalton Dyer glanced at Theo, a pleading look in his eyes. He was clearly out of his depth and hadn't questioned his client properly, and would look like a complete fool in court if Theo decided not to drop his ridiculous claim.

"Mr Dalton, do you have any questions for Mr Malfoy?" Hermione asked and her question was met with a blank stare. "No? That's it then. We'll give you twenty-four hours to make your decision." Hermione stood, as did the three men beside her. "We suggest you also consider Mr Malfoy's compensation offer. We believe it's quite generous."

"Mr Dyer, you have our contact details," Isaac added. "Please advise of your decision by ten tomorrow morning. If we don't hear from you, we'll file with the Wizengamot first thing Monday morning."

"I don't think that will be necessary," Dalton croaked. "Mr Nott will accept your offer and drop the case."

"Excellent," Thomas said. "We'll have the paperwork to you within the hour. Ms Granger, if you'll lead the way."

"Gladly." Hermione nodded and headed for the door, refusing to glance back.

When they were in the hallway, Draco took Hermione's hand, squeezing it tightly. "I was wrong. You are *beyond* incredible."

"I'd have to agree," Isaac said. "You made it look easy. Are you sure you won't take our job offer?"

"This was fun, but I'm positive," she replied with a laugh. "I'm quite happy with my little shop."

"Well, our offer still stands." Thomas squeezed Draco's arm. "Don't you ever let her go, Draco."

Draco lifted her fingers to his lips. "I don't ever plan to."

The sickly sweet scent hit her, making her flinch, the instant the door opened. Floral and fruity, it was unlike anything she ever smelled at Harry's before. She didn't think Pansy would use anything so overpowering, and she was also certain Harry would be put off by, rather than be attracted to, the aroma.

"Granger?" Draco touched her shoulder. "What is it?"

Hermione shrugged; the scent seemed to be waning already. "Nothing. Just a hit of something... flowery."

Draco sniffed and shook his head. "Must be just you."

Harry laughed. "Is this normal for you two?"

"Pretty much." Hermione hugged him as she stepped inside. "Did you buy Pansy flowers today?"

Harry shook Draco's hand and closed the door behind them. "No, but her mother was here earlier. Maybe that's it."

"Maybe," Hermione agreed, but frowned. It wasn't a lingering scent — it had been quick and powerful. Like a punch to the stomach. And while the scent was unbearably sweet, it also seemed to kick something inside her and stir her in a way she'd not felt before.

"Whoa! Hermione!" Harry grabbed her around the waist, stopping her from stumbling backwards. "Are you okay?"

"Darling, look at me?" Draco held her face in his hands, trying to get her to focus on him.

"What's happened?" Pansy's voice was alarmed as she joined them and Hermione blinked at the sound.

"Not sure," Harry said. "She just got all woozy."

"Woozy?" Hermione looked up at Draco. His eyes had darkened, but she saw the relief wash over his face as she spoke. "When did you turn into my grandmother?"

Harry loosened his grip, but kept one arm around her. "What would you have said?"

"Lightheaded," Hermione said. "Faint."

Harry poked her rib. "Like I said, woozy."

"Come and sit down." Pansy looped her arm through Hermione's, tugging her towards the living room. "And get her some water, Harry."

Pansy ordered her to sit on the couch and Draco took the spot right beside her, frowning as she protested all the attention.

"I'm fine. I can't even smell it anymore."

"What was it?" Pansy asked, sitting on the sofa opposite them.

"No idea. It was really sweet and flowery. I can't imagine you or Harry having anything that sweet in the house."

"It was probably Mum. Her perfume makes me gag, it's so sickly."

"That's what I said." Harry returned from the kitchen and handed Hermione the glass of water. "We almost have to fumigate the house every time she comes over."

"I guess that was it then." Hermione sipped her water, but she knew it wasn't that simple. Draco squeezed her thigh and she glanced up at him. She smiled; he also knew it wasn't that simple.

"Hey!" Pansy exclaimed and waved a hand at them. "None of that secret Alpha crap, thanks. What's going on?"

"It's nothing, Pansy, not really. Draco usually scents the same things, but he didn't this time, so it's just a bit weird."

"Maybe it's an allergy," Harry suggested and poured two glasses of scotch and two of wine. "There might have been something in Jane's perfume that set you off."

"It's probably that." Draco nodded in agreement but Hermione knew he was still concerned.

"But I'm fine now, so let's move on."

"Ooh, yeah." Pansy rubbed her hands together sinisterly. "How did this morning go?"

"You won't be surprised that Mr Nott has dropped his case," Draco informed them. "I made an offer that he could hardly refuse."

"And the offer was...?" Harry asked.

"Hermione suggested, since he wasted my time, he pay my legal fees," Draco replied with a wicked grin. "He was too stupid to even look at the offer before his equally stupid solicitor agreed to it."

"He was never going to win," Harry said. "Especially with Hermione on your side."

"And believe me, I'm glad she's on my side." Draco kissed her cheek. "After seeing her this morning, Theo's balls crawled so far into his body he'll need a healer to find them."

"Eew." Pansy screwed her face up. "That's disgusting."

"Maybe, but it's true." Draco slid his hand along Hermione's thigh. "She was incredible."

Hermione rolled her eyes, but smiled. "It was easy since we were dealing with idiots."

"Are you thinking about going back into law?" Harry asked.

"Definitely not. This was just to help Draco."

"So, it wasn't your chance to get even with Theo and Gemma then?" Pansy raised an eyebrow and grinned wickedly.

"That never even entered my mind," Hermione replied. "That would be unconscionable and revenge is never a good reason to file a lawsuit."

"Yeah, right," Pansy laughed. "Did you make him call you Mudblood?"

"No, but his counsel almost shat himself when he realised Theo had called her that," Draco told them. "They saw the Alpha that is Hermione Granger today. I doubt we'll have any further issues with them."

"You've finally got this Alpha shit under control then?" Pansy looked suitably impressed.

"I think so. Other than sickly sweet perfume making me dizzy." Hermione leaned forward to pick up her wine glass, tipping it towards Pansy. "Also, just so you're aware, I'll be pissed if *you* cooked and you poison me."

Draco leaned on the doorframe, watching her brush her teeth. He'd been worried since her dizzy spell in Potter's hallway and had been wondering why he wasn't able to scent the aroma that had caused it.

"Mm otay," she said around the toothbrush. "Dop wowwyng"

Draco stood behind her and caressed the back of her neck. "I will always worry. Especially when you almost drop to the floor for no apparent reason."

She rinsed her mouth and picked up the towel to dry her face, her eyes trained on his in the mirror. "I think I know what it was." She turned to face him. "But you can't tell anyone."

"Sounds ominous." Draco wrapped his hands around her waist and pulled her to him. "What do you think it was?"

"You have to promise me first. I won't tell you if you don't."

"You have my word; I promise not to tell a single soul."

"Pansy's pregnant."

Draco's jaw dropped open and he made a choking sound. "What?"

"She doesn't know yet, that's why you can't tell anyone. Well, I don't think she knows."

"How do *you* know?"

"I'm not sure. It's hard to explain the feeling. But the scent was so sweet and new, and I only smelled it for a few seconds — which was unusual — so I think it's the Alpha letting me know there's something — or someone — new about to come into my family."

"So, it comes down to the family thing again?" Draco nodded slowly. "That makes sense, but would it be so prevalent in a family you chose? I mean, Potter is the forefront of that, not Pansy."

"I think it's just the basics again, like when I first scented Narcissa on Lucius. It's the female Alpha. It's the recognition that one of my own is... I'm not sure *altered* is the right word, but something has shifted," Hermione explained. "And if I'm right about this, Harry is the baby's father so he's part of it and that's why the scent was so intense."

"So, you don't think they know yet?"

"They might not, but I think Pansy might suspect it." Hermione shrugged and grinned mischievously. "I noticed halfway through dinner she wasn't drinking her wine."

Draco laughed. "So, this is not the Alpha at all. Just good detective work."

"Maybe, but..." She twisted her lips nervously. "It made me dizzy and I think..."

"Hey." Draco touched her cheek as she turned away. "That doesn't make you weak, it was unexpected—"

"It's not that. It wasn't a feeling of weakness. It was... It was like my entire body reacted. It was a feeling of complete emptiness. And it was only for a few seconds, but I felt..." She looked at him with a confused expression.

"Jealous?" Draco asked carefully and she nodded.

"I shouldn't be, and I'm not. *Really* I'm not. If they are pregnant, I'll be so incredibly happy for them, it's just that..." She paused and closed her eyes. "Why can't I explain this properly?"

"Because we haven't discussed anything beyond this ceremony." Draco kissed her forehead. "We've not talked about where we'll live; here or at my flat or even somewhere new." He paused and took a breath. "But somewhere new would have to include a garden... If they are having a baby, I'll be more jealous than you."

"Really?"

"Really." He touched the tip of one finger to her belly. "It wasn't ever something I wanted... a family of my own. But since you came into my life, it's all I want."

"Why haven't you said anything?"

"Why haven't *you* said anything?" Draco countered.

"Honestly, I wasn't sure. But after tonight..." she pressed her palm to her stomach. "That feeling was so overwhelming and I knew without a doubt it's what I want."

Draco grinned. "So, I'll start moving my things over here tomorrow then."

"I don't want to make a baby tomorrow, Draco." She rolled her eyes, then squealed in surprise when he lifted her over his shoulder and walked down the hallway to the bedroom.

"No, but until we decide it's time, we can certainly practise."

Chapter End Notes

Once again, I must apologise for the delay.

Thank you so much for being patient and sticking with this xx

Chapter 27

Hermione stretched over his torso, the softness of her body pressed against the hardness of his. She moved with a languid grace, the heat between her thighs sliding along his cock, her skin like silk beneath his palms.

She'd been insatiable — not that he was complaining — waking him several times during the night, crawling over him and taking him inside her.

He loved her ever-growing confidence, loved that she'd begun to know exactly what she wanted and was almost never afraid to ask for it. And it wasn't just in the bedroom.

Since her realisation of Pansy's pregnancy and their subsequent conversation, things had changed. And for the better. They'd finally talked about their lives beyond the bonding ceremony, deciding her house was where they would live until they needed more space. And yes, they both wanted a family. He had expressed his fears that they might have a child who would have to cope with becoming an Alpha. Of course, her logical and calm response was that they would simply deal with anything that might come their way.

And it was that logic and calm that was now shining through. She'd finally stopped trying to be the Alpha everyone expected and was becoming the Alpha she was meant to be.

"Hey," she whispered, lifting her head to look at him. "Where'd you go?"

"Nowhere," he assured her. "I'm right here."

He wound his hands into her hair and dragged her mouth to his. He kissed her slowly, keeping to the rhythm she'd set. Nothing she'd done each time she'd woken him had been rushed. She'd taken her time, had touched him, kissed him, ridden him slowly — easily — never speeding up. It had been incredible. *She* had been incredible. She had taken complete control and he had simply laid back and enjoyed her.

And now he was enjoying her once more.

He had come to love these simple moments with her — when he got to see her as the confident woman she had always been. He gazed up at her, the feelings that came over him every time he saw her threatening to overwhelm him again. Her quiet beauty, her capacity for forgiveness, her fierce intellect... he truly wasn't worthy of her affection.

"Stop thinking," she told him, her eyes glowing gold as she sat up and lifted her hips, engulfing him inside her body.

Draco groaned; he didn't think he'd ever get used to the warmth of her. The taste of her, the feel of her skin against his, the tight sheath of her body surrounding him was like nothing else he had ever known.

She leaned down and braced her hands on his chest, staring down at him while she began to slowly roll her hips and slide up and down his cock. Draco stroked her thighs, feeling the muscles flex as she moved. He squeezed gently and she smiled down at him. No words were needed. Not anymore. When they were joined as they were, they both knew what the other needed — whether it be give or take. And *take* was clearly what she needed.

"Draco, your mind is racing." She continued her slow grind over him, but her eyes had darkened. "Tell me."

"Just thinking how far you've come."

She smiled down at him. "And that I'm no longer the psycho I was?"

"You weren't a psycho. You were going through some crazy changes—" he grunted as her wet skin brushed over his knot "—but look at you now." He slid his hands over her stomach and up to cover her breasts. "You're a goddess."

Hermione sat up and covered his hands with hers. She dragged one of them down between her spread thighs, pressing his fingers to her slick skin. "Touch me."

Draco moved his thumb to her clit, circling the tiny bud in the way he knew would pull her release closer to the surface. Her hand slid back up her body, stopping briefly to squeeze her breast, then continued up to the base of her throat. She let her head fall back and breathed a contented sigh into the air. Rolling her hips, she leaned back slightly and took him in deeper, his knot threatening to disappear inside her body. But he didn't want that. Didn't want this to be over quickly. He was enjoying the slow grind of her body too much.

He matched her unhurried rhythm, thrusting up into her as she ground down. His thumb continued to stroke her clit and his hand covering her breast moved to grip her hip, keeping her movements slow and even.

"Draco... this is..." She opened her eyes and glanced down at him. The gold flecks in her irises sparkled and he realised she was closer than he thought.

"I know, Darling." He pressed his thumb hard against her throbbing clit and she groaned, falling forward, her hands landing on his chest. He felt her shudder, felt the tight clench around his cock. Her arms gave out and she landed on his chest, her body quivering, her mouth sucking the gland on his neck and pulling his release into her body.

Draco wrapped his arms around her, their bodies sweaty and warm, their scents combining, their magic swirling and reaching, each finding its home in the other.

Hermione sighed and burrowed into him, her full weight pressing against him as she murmured his name and drifted off to sleep again.

"You were a bit more... amorous than usual last night, not that I'm complaining. Is everything alright?"

They'd dozed for several hours, catching up on the loss of sleep that had occurred through the night. And now they were laying in bed, face to face, Draco curious about what had spurred her lust.

"I'm heading to Milan with your mother for two days."

"You don't want to go?" Draco slid his hand over the curve of her hip. "I thought you liked my mother."

"I adore her, you know that. But, I won't see you for two days."

A smile of understanding curled Draco's mouth. "So, you thought you'd mark me?"

"No," she replied indignantly. "We've not spent a night apart since we started sleeping together. Two days without my mate is something I'm not looking forward to, that's all."

Draco laughed. "Rubbish. You spent the entire night marking me, Granger. Why didn't you just say something?" He reached between her thighs and pressed the tip of his finger just inside her. "I've no issues wearing your scent." He touched his finger to the gland at his throat, painting his skin with her scent.

"I was worried you'd think me a complete idiot." Her eyes followed his hand as he touched her entrance once more, then circled his wet fingers over the opposite gland.

"No," he assured her. "Not an idiot. Just an Alpha ensuring her mate knows who's boss."

"Draco, I'm not—"

He pressed his fingers to her lips. "We're equal, I know. But, it's your right to mark me when you're going away."

"You're okay with it?"

"If the roles were reversed, you can guarantee you'd resemble a Jackson Pollock painting before I left."

"Eew," Hermione cringed. "That's a disgusting image."

Draco laughed and rolled them over, his heavy frame pressing her into the mattress. He linked their hands and held them above her head. "Well, since you've marked me, I might have to cover you with *my* scent." He ducked his head and ran his tongue over the base of her throat. "I just don't think that will be enough."

"I'm sure your tongue will be more than enough." Hermione tilted her head back, encouraging him to continue. "And I do *not* need you to... *paint* me."

Draco thrust his hips against her. "You don't want my scent on you?"

"Your scent is always on me." She wrapped her legs around his hips. "But I definitely don't need to be covered in your endless amount of Alpha jizz."

Draco stared down at her for several seconds then cracked up laughing. "Endless Alpha jizz?"

Hermione giggled. "You know it's true. I've had to shower more in the last few months than in my entire life because of you."

Draco rolled off her, still laughing. "I'm sorry I've made your life such a hardship."

"Pfft, since you're always with me, you've enjoyed those showers." Hermione rolled to her side, propping herself up on one elbow and draping her leg over his. "In fact, I'm starting to think this is a deliberate ploy of yours to keep me naked."

"Well, I must say I rather enjoy the view." He shifted to his side. "Granger, I don't want you to ever think you can't mark me. We've bonded, and this ceremony will seal that, but wanting to put your scent on me is completely normal, especially when we're going to be apart."

"Just one more weird Alpha thing, I guess." She touched the base of his throat. "Did you ever think you'd be here?"

"Not once," he answered honestly. "I assumed I would just keep living the aimless life I was, but now I can't imagine anything else."

She grinned. "Just one more weird Alpha thing."

Draco rolled them gently, covering her with his body and smiling down at her. "The only weird thing about this is that I knew."

She frowned at him. "You knew?"

"I knew, Granger. The second you walked into the ballroom with Krum... I knew you were special."

"What?" she whispered, her face coloured with shock.

"I was so jealous of him that night." He curled his arms around her head and kissed her with a reverence he'd never shown anyone. "And it wasn't just that night. I was jealous of any male who went near you. I felt something all those years ago whenever I was close to you, and it was worse when I was away from you. I just never understood what it was. I knew I was destined to be an Alpha, but I didn't realise what I was feeling was the pull of my mate."

"Draco..."

"I'm so sorry for all the things I ever said to you and did to you. I can't ever say sorry enough." He brushed a tear from her cheek. "I was beyond cruel to you and, I know it's not an excuse, but I was so confused about what I was feeling. It was why I was such an arse. Nothing about what I was feeling made any sense. You were..." He touched her face. "You were a Mudblood, you weren't who I was supposed to have feelings for."

"Why haven't you said anything?"

"I didn't realise what it was until you went missing. When you were gone, I felt the same as I did back then." He kissed her again. "That same pull, those same feelings, but this time I knew what those feelings were."

When he shifted his hips, her legs curled around him and the head of his aching cock pressed against her entrance, pushing forward, sinking into the tight warmth of her body. He moved over her, his hips driving into her with strong, powerful thrusts. He kissed her hard, wanting her to know in that moment just how much he needed her. Hermione wrapped her arms around his shoulders, holding him to her, her fingers digging into his back as she gasped with each slam of his hips against hers.

"Draco..." she groaned, her body tensing, her head flung back, her neck taut as she cried out. "Draco... oh, gods... please!"

"Give it to me," he grunted into the curve of her shoulder. "Give me everything."

She shook beneath him, crying out his name. He grabbed her chin, turning her face to his, covering her mouth and kissing her as her orgasm tore through her body. His own release followed hers, crashing into him and sending sparks of pleasure down his spine. He collapsed onto her, his mouth opening over her gland and grazing the sensitive skin with his teeth. She held him tighter, a quiet sob sounding in his ear.

He lifted his head to look at her, she was smiling but her eyes held unspilled tears

"Okay?"

"Draco... that was... you... I love you." She hiccupped and he kissed her through her tears.

"I love you. I've always loved you. I was just too stupid to realise it and too scared to tell you."

Hermione stared out over the city. The sun was dipping low and the terrace of their suite gave her one of the best views in all of Milan.

Earlier, they'd been greeted by the friendly concierge as they entered the hotel which could only be described as breathtaking. Parquet floors, a stunning chandelier, sky-high columns, and a marble staircase — the lobby of the Palazzo Parigi Hotel was spectacular; she hated to think of how much their two nights would cost.

And their suite was bigger than her house. *Two* suites in actuality — the Penthouse and the Royal — which could be joined together to make one giant space. It was ridiculous, but Narcissa had scoffed at hers and Hannah's claims that they didn't need this much room, that they would be happy sleeping on the massive couches in the suite's living room.

She'd laughed as she unpacked her suitcase — well, her overnight bag — into the walk-in closet that was bigger than her bedroom. She'd only brought enough clothes for their stay, and her three outfits looked ridiculous hanging in the massive space.

But, despite her amusement at the ridiculousness, her thoughts had returned to Draco and his admission in the hours before she left.

Nothing about what I was feeling made any sense.

When you were gone, I felt the same as I did back then.

I love you. I've always loved you. I was just too stupid to realise it and too scared to tell you.

His behaviour towards her when they were children was deplorable and his realisations didn't excuse the way he'd treated her, but she understood completely the ups and downs that came with being an Alpha. The fact, however, that he knew something *before* he was an Alpha made no sense. And that was confusing her.

"Hermione?"

She turned and almost laughed; Hannah and Narcissa were peering around the doorframe, their faces full of concern.

"Is everything alright, darling?" Narcissa stepped out onto the terrace cautiously.

"I'm fine, why?"

"The walls rattled," Hannah explained. "Well, everything *on* the walls rattled."

Hermione pinched the bridge of her nose. "Sorry, I thought I had this under control."

"I'm certain most times you do." Narcissa touched a gentle hand between Hermione's shoulders. "But something is obviously bothering you."

"Hold on," Hannah said and disappeared into the suite. A few moments later, she returned with a bottle of wine and three glasses, taking a seat on the comfortable outdoor sofa. "We're in Italy. We need wine."

"I agree." Narcissa sat beside Hannah, leaving the armchair for Hermione. "Fill those glasses up, Hannah. We'll order room service tonight and enjoy an evening under the stars."

Hannah did as she was instructed and Hermione curled herself into the chair. She was glad Narcissa suggested a night in. They were in Milan, a city steeped in history and art and culture, but she couldn't deal with any of it right then.

"Tell us," Hannah said, handing her a glass. "What made the walls rattle?"

She glanced quickly at Narcissa and swallowed half her glass in one go. "It's Draco."

"I wondered. He seems to be the one who constantly gets under your skin," Narcissa said and sipped her own wine. "Now, darling, I'm not his mother right now — I'm your friend. You can say anything and I won't defend him."

"No, it's not like that. It's just..." she sighed. "Every time I think I've got this thing sorted, something else happens and I feel like I take another step back."

"That sounds like Draco," Hannah said and glanced quickly at Narcissa. "Sorry."

Narcissa squeezed Hannah's arm and laughed, "No, you're correct. That sounds like Draco. What did he say?"

"Before I left, he told me he loved me." Hermione smiled at their wistful expressions. "He says it all the time, but this time he told me he had *always* loved me, that he knew something was different when Viktor escorted me to the Yule Ball."

"Really?" Narcissa's expression turned to one of surprise. "He never said a word."

"He felt he couldn't, not under the circumstances." Hermione winced at her words, but Narcissa waved them away.

"Of course he couldn't. His father and I would have never allowed it," she admitted. "But you know that's not true now."

"I do," Hermione answered quickly.

"What did he tell you?" Narcissa asked. "Does he think it will cause problems for the ceremony?"

"I don't think so. It was more like he was confused and needed to tell me before this all happens."

"But he was only fourteen at the time of the ball," Hannah said, sounding confused. "He wasn't even close to becoming an Alpha."

"He said he didn't understand it at the time. The feelings, I mean. And with everything he'd been led to believe, the pull towards me made no sense to him."

"He felt a pull towards you? All those years ago, he could tell?" Narcissa was frowning, as if trying to figure out why.

"He said he felt it every time I was near him. But he didn't realise what it was until my recent disappearing act. When he didn't know where I was, he said it was the same pull, the same jealousy that I might be with someone else."

"This is not normal Alpha behaviour," Narcissa noted. "And I think you've been an Alpha for much longer than we thought. He sensed it even though you weren't aware."

"Is that why he... *ah*... played the field?" Hannah winced as she glanced between them. "He knew there was something about Hermione, but refused to act on it?"

"It's possible," Narcissa answered with a nod. "Lucius and I thought the fact he wouldn't settle down was just him being an Alpha, trying to prove himself to the world."

"Is that why he resisted you at first? When you became an Alpha?" Hannah asked. "He didn't want to admit those feelings were true?"

Hermione shrugged. "Maybe. I didn't know any of this until last night, and I mean, we weren't friends, not really. We were polite when we saw each other, but that wasn't often. But..." She glanced at Narcissa again.

"Not his mother tonight, darling," she reminded Hermione. "Whatever you wish to share with us stays between us. I promise."

Hermione nodded and continued. "He said the reason he treated my so badly — teasing me about my stupid hair and calling me Mudblood — is because of those feelings he didn't understand."

"That doesn't make it right," Hannah snapped. "He should have discussed what he was feeling with his mother. Narcissa has proven she knows more about Alphas than anyone else."

Hermione smiled at her friend. Hannah had been her biggest protector and Draco had borne the brunt of that protection more often than not.

"No, it doesn't. And unfortunately that's something that will stick with me." She held her hand up to Narcissa. "I don't hold it against him, but his words and actions back then were unpleasant, especially since I didn't even know what I'd done to deserve it."

"Hermione, everything he did and said was our fault. We taught him from birth that he was above Muggleborns, and for that reason he treated you incredibly poorly." Narcissa paused then huffed out a laugh. "Sorry, I wasn't going to be his mother, was I?"

"I don't mind," Hermione told her. "You are his mother and that will always come first. I don't blame any of you, not anymore. You've welcomed me into your family and you wouldn't have done that if you'd still held those old beliefs. And yes, those thoughts will always be with me, but right now I'm not actually concerned about his past actions, I'm concerned about him."

"So you *do* think he's worried this might cause a problem with the ceremony?" Hannah leaned forward. "Will it be a problem?"

"No, I'm just worried that he told me this right before I left to come here. He was so confused about it, and he was worried that I might be upset that he was using his actions to cover up his true feelings for me back then. He just didn't seem like himself. He was just... so filled with guilt."

"You're worried about leaving him alone." Narcissa touched her hand over her heart.

"Darling, you are so much more than I could have ever hoped for him. The love you have for him goes far beyond anything that is Alpha."

"His stupid arse doesn't deserve you," Hannah said, but her smile took away any venom behind her words.

"Hermione, darling, you are unlike any Alpha that has ever existed. Your love for everyone around you is the most beautiful thing I have ever known. And Hannah is right, my son probably doesn't deserve you, but I can assure you of one thing; he loves you, Hermione. He loves you with a passion I've never seen in him, and he will spend the rest of his life atoning for his past behaviour."

"I'm so sorry." Hermione apologised. "I just... there's nothing... I'm so sorry."

Narcissa wrapped her arm around Hermione's shoulders, hugging her tightly. "Do not apologise. This is something that is important and you are not to simply settle to placate us."

"We'll keep looking," Hannah added. "There's a few more shops we haven't looked in yet. And if all else fails, marry him in jeans."

Hermione laughed, "I'm not sure that'd be appropriate. I feel underdressed here, let alone if I wore this to my wedding."

She looked down at her clothes; she was dressed casually in jeans, an olive-coloured t-shirt with a large sunflower printed on it, and comfortable ballet flats. Hannah was dressed similarly, her jeans a slightly darker shade and paired with a simple white halter-neck racer-back top

Hannah shrugged, "Meh, we're in the fashion capital of Italy wearing jeans and T-shirts. Your wedding would be a breeze after this."

"You both look fine," Narcissa told them, "and you'll know the perfect dress the second you see it."

"I guess," Hermione agreed a little despondently.

They'd been in and out of a dozen designer dress shops and she hadn't found anything she even considered a possibility. She wasn't sure if her lack of enthusiasm was due to the constant thoughts of Draco and the guilt he was still harbouring, but Hannah's jeans idea was becoming more realistic with each passing shop.

"Chin up, 's another shop two streets over and if there's nothing there, we'll head back to the hotel and have some dinner, and we'll look again tomorrow."

"And if she still finds nothing...?" Hannah fell into step as Narcissa directed them down the street.

"Paris next weekend," Narcissa replied with a grin.

"Ah, we can't close the shop two weekends in a row," Hermione argued. "This weekend is too much."

"Nonsense," Narcissa chided. "You're a Malfoy now. You don't have to worry about taking a weekend off."

"Narcissa—"

"I'll hear nothing more about it," Narcissa said in a tone that let Hermione know there was no point in arguing.

She'd already had a heated discussion with her future in-laws when Narcissa suggested that Hannah join them on their trip to Italy. Hermione had been adamant she couldn't close her shop for two days, but they had insisted they would recompense any losses she would incur. It was something she was unaccustomed to; a shit-ton of money that she couldn't even fathom. She was far from destitute, but the Malfoy fortune was something she couldn't wrap her head around. In the end, Hannah had been the one to convince her. Girls' weekends had never been a consideration since one of them had to be in the shop, but Hannah had so eloquently stated that she should pull her stubborn head out of her arse and take full advantage of being a Malfoy.

So she had finally agreed and for the first time since she'd opened her shop, it was closed for two days. But it was looking like it was a waste. The more shops and boutiques they went into, the less enthusiastic she became.

Hermione sighed, drifting from the conversation and glancing absently into the windows as they strolled down the street. This row of shops seemed to be made up of antique and vintage shops. Old trinkets and books, jewellery and clothes — all things she'd love to stop and look at if she had more time.

And then she did stop. Abruptly. Her breath caught and just like Narcissa had said, she knew the dress when she saw it.

"Hermione?" Hannah's voice called from up the street.

She looked up and saw the knowing expression on Narcissa's face as they retraced their steps.

"You found it?"

Hermione nodded and pointed to the mannequin in the window. "That's the dress."

Hannah tilted her head back and read the sign over the window, squinting at the Italian words. "Vintage Delirium, I think it says."

Narcissa nodded. "Yes, it's rather well-known, actually. I never thought about trying the vintage shops. I should have known they would be more your style."

"It probably won't fit." Hermione's heart was pounding. She didn't want to get her hopes up. She wasn't one for frills and sequins, and the simple, elegant sheath gown was exactly what

she'd pictured. Off-white satin that dipped low in the back with a V-neckline and thin straps. It was perfect.

"Darling," Narcissa began, looping her arm through Hermione's and pulled her into the shop. "There's only one way to find out."

Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)



"You aren't allowed to leave me for more than a day ever again."

Hermione laughed as Draco curled himself around her, tucking her against his body and holding her tightly, his face pressing into her neck. He'd pounced on her the second she'd arrived home, stripping her naked and sucking on each of her glands until he turned her into a boneless pile of goo. His scent was all over her, more so than usual, and he hadn't yet stopped touching her.

"And here I thought I was the sappy fool," she remarked as his hand drifted down to the gland on the inside of her thigh. She sighed and lifted her leg, tucking her foot behind his, giving him easier access to touch her.

"You are a sappy fool, but I missed you much more than I thought I would," he admitted. "I knew where you were and that you were safe, but I felt those same feelings again. Like I'd lost you."

"Draco..." Hermione twisted in his arms, her concern outweighing her want to have his fingers sliding inside her again. His cheeks were tinged pink and his eyes were a heavy grey. He was embarrassed at his admission. "I'm not going anywhere, you know that, right?"

"I know." He shifted down the bed so their faces were level and twisted a lock of her hair around his finger. "I just don't understand why I'm feeling like this."

"Like what?"

"Like I did when I first changed. Like all of a sudden there's this one thing I can't control and it's driving me mad."

Hermione touched his cheek. "I know how that feels. I still have fits of anger that have people backing away from me."

Draco turned into her touch, kissing her palm, then smiled nervously at her. "I need to say something, but..."

Hermione waited for him to continue, but he just stared at her, a small frown on his face.

"Draco, just say whatever it is. You need to let me know if I'm doing something that's bothering you."

"No, it's not you. I think this is all me." He shook his head. "And I'm going to be a total... Alpha male in saying it."

Hermione kissed him. "Good. Be an Alpha. Follow your instincts. It doesn't matter how shitty you think it is. Tell me."

Draco touched his finger to her throat gland, but she gently circled his wrist and pulled his hand away.

"No, don't soothe me. Just tell me. It can't be that bad."

"All my life," he began, "I was taught I was above everything. I was constantly told I was a talented wizard, that I was far more intelligent than any other witch or wizard my age. Then when I was eleven years old, that all changed. I hated you. I hated how smart you were, how you seemed to know everything that I didn't and more. I hated that a *girl* was smarter than me. A girl who I learned very early on hadn't known she was a witch until she turned eleven. And in less than a year, she knew more about my world than I did."

"That's because she's a total nerd."

Draco smiled and kissed her forehead. "I hated you, Hermione. I hated you like... I can't even explain it. Everything about you pissed me off. I mean *everything*. I never once looked at you and thought, 'Oh, she's brilliant. I could learn from her.' You being so incredibly intelligent was never a positive, it just made me hate you more."

"Until the Yule Ball?"

"Yes... no... I think that just made it all worse. I realised I was in love with you but hated you at the same time. I was raised amongst strong women, but those same women all stood behind the men in their lives. And I assumed I would have a wife who did the same."

Hermione smiled at him and tapped the tip of his nose. "That's because you were looking at those women with male eyes."

"Male eyes?"

"Yes. *Male* eyes," Hermione repeated. "Do you honestly think your father has any say in what your mother chooses to do? Do you think he controls her? Or would dare to even stand in her way when her mind was set? Bellatrix — as crazy as she was — might have bowed down to Voldemort, but she stood amongst men and was never thought of as less than them. And your Aunt Andromeda stood up to her own father and chose the life she wanted, not the life she was expected to live. Pansy, Ginny, Molly, Daphne." Hermione smirked. "Hannah. Do you think any of them would take kindly to being treated as less than a man? Alpha or not."

Draco shook his head. "No. But... I've done nothing but act like women are beneath me. Look at my life in recent years. I've told myself I'm an Alpha and have acted like the dominant arse I assumed I was supposed to be. And I can't get it out of my head that I'm supposed to be domineering and possessive of you."

"Draco, no. You *are* an Alpha. But that's not the only thing you are. You are so much more than you ever let the people around you see." She placed her hand over his heart. "You are more than you ever allow yourself to see. You might think all those things about yourself — that you're a domineering arse — but all I see is you. The *real* you. You were the boy who realised his mistakes and you have become the man who learned from them. The man who is

still learning from them. Your Alpha instinct to protect me isn't a flaw. It's who you are. Who you were taught to be."

"I was taught to be a bigot."

"Yes, you were. But quite clearly that's not something that has stuck with you. And I've watched your parents. I've watched how they are with you and with each other. And with me now. They have also taught you to protect the people you love. Your family and friends all know that Draco Malfoy has their backs and that he would rip the throats out of anyone who would do them harm."

"You see more than what's there."

"No. I see exactly what's in front of me. I see you. I see confidence and strength, but I also see compassion and love." Hermione moved her hand back to the base of his throat. "I'm constantly being told that I have a need to protect everyone around me, but you're the same. You may not always have been, but you are that person now."

"I don't deserve you." Draco danced his fingers along her collarbone, his eyes finally lightening as her words took hold.

"You do deserve me," Hermione said, making him laugh. "Why are you suddenly worried about all of this? You've confessed quite a lot in the last few days."

"I just wanted to be honest with you. I didn't want to have the ceremony with any of this unsaid."

"A clean start." Hermione nodded in understanding.

"A clean start," Draco agreed. "I don't want there to be any doubts in your mind as to who it is you're binding yourself to. I want this to be more than the Alphas. I want this to be us."

"I have no doubts, Draco." Hermione shifted closer to him and kissed the place over his heart. "And we're already us."

"Draco's gonna jizz in his pants when he sees you."

"Harry!" Hermione made a face in the mirror.

"It's true." Ron was grinning when his head appeared over Hermione's shoulder in the reflection. "I doubt you'll even be at the reception afterwards. He'll want you in a way that would not be suitable for public viewing when he catches a glimpse of you in that dress."

She turned to face her two best friends. "Those are the comments I expect from your wives, not from you two."

"Yeah, well they're not here so we have to fill their shoes," Harry quipped.

"And they're pissed off about this whole no bridesmaid thing," Ron added.

"I explained that already! I can't have bridesmaids who need to be in a family circle!" Hermione exclaimed angrily and jabbed her finger in the air at them both. "You two need to stop teasing me. I don't need this bullshit. Not today."

"Hey, we were just kidding around." Ron reached out and took her hand. "Sorry."

"What's happened?" Harry asked.

Hermione looked at him, biting her lip and swallowing the lump that had formed in her throat. "Nothing."

"Hermione." Harry moved to stand in front of her, his hands cupping her face in a gesture so sweet, tears welled in her eyes. "This isn't nothing. What's going on?"

Her lips trembled and tears spilled down her cheeks. "Am I making a mistake?"

Harry and Ron shared a surprised look.

"A mistake?" Ron asked cautiously, then glanced towards the windows overlooking the Manor gardens. "Getting married *here*?"

She shook her head. "No. This whole thing. Draco."

"Ah..." Harry's eyes darted towards Ron again.

"Do *you* think it's a mistake?" Ron winced as Harry punched his arm.

"That's not what you should be asking!"

"Why not?" Ron shrugged. "If she thinks it's a mistake, we need to stop it all before the ceremony happens and they're bound together forever." He returned his gaze to Hermione.

"Why do you think it's a mistake? Did Malfoy do something?"

"Nothing more than be his usual dickish self."

"Hermione, tears and a tantrum are more than him just being a dick," Harry said. "We need a bit more to go on than that."

"All this week he's been a possessive arse!" Hermione pulled away from them both and turned towards the window. "He's been like my shadow. He takes me to work and is there to pick me up again when I'm done. *And* he's been there every day at lunch. I can't even take a breath without him right beside me. If this is what he's going to be like, I don't want any part of it!"

"Hermione—" Harry began, but Hermione ignored him.

"He's spent the last month confessing every feeling or action from our teen years, no matter how fucking insignificant it was or how many times I told him I didn't care about the past. I had to listen to all that bullshit and now this?"

"Hermione—" Ron tried, but to no avail.

"I'm not some simpering Omega who will bend to his will. I'm an Alpha. I won't let him treat me like I'm one of his possessions!"

"Hermione!" Harry shouted and she spun around to find them both grinning at her

"What!?"

"He won't be like this after today," Harry assured her.

"Excuse me?"

"Hermione, how he's acting hasn't got anything to do with him trying to own you," Ron explained. "Every second of the entire week before we were married, I thought Daph was gonna run off."

"I was the same," Harry added. "All I could think of was why Pansy would want to marry me."

"Of course she wanted to marry you," Hermione said then looked at Ron. "And Daph wasn't going anywhere."

"We know that now, but in the weeks leading up to the wedding, and especially that last week, it was all panic."

"But why?"

"Weddings are usually all about the bride and the groom kind of gets shoved to the side," Harry said. "But I know I was always aware of where Pansy was in the week leading up to it. I might have hidden it better than Draco, but I still thought she'd realise I wasn't good enough for her and call it all off."

"That's insane." Hermione looked between them.

"Maybe," Ron said with a shrug. "But it's how we felt. And I can guarantee Malfoy has had all those same feelings this week. More so because he's Alpha. *Even* more so because it's you." Ron pulled her into his arms, hugging her fiercely. "He doesn't deserve you. You're way too good for him. But I know how much he loves you and how much you love him. And it's got nothing to do with you being Alphas."

"Ron's right," Harry said, taking one of her hands in his. "I love Pansy and I know Ron loves Daph, but you two? You're in a whole other stratosphere."

"So, I'm being ridiculous again?" Hermione asked.

"A little bit." Ron released her from his embrace. "But you're marrying Malfoy today. Throwing a tantrum seems like the least ridiculous thing you could do."

Hermione punched his arm and laughed. "I'm marrying Draco Malfoy."

"Yep," Harry said and pointed at each of them in turn. "Daphne Greengrass. Pansy Parkinson. Draco Malfoy. I think we've all mastered in ridiculousness."

A loud knock startled them all. The door opened slightly and Draco's voice was full of concern when he spoke.

"Hermione?"

"Don't come in here!" Hermione cried. "You can't see me yet."

"I know. I just felt... Are you alright?"

"I'm fine now." She smiled at Ron and Harry. "I just had another crazy meltdown."

A silent pause followed her words then Draco's hand appeared around the door. "Come here."

"Draco, you're not supposed to see me—"

"I won't see you, just let me touch you."

"Draco, I don't think we can."

"Hermione. Please?"

"He never calls you Hermione," Ron whispered. "He's desperate."

"I can hear you, Weasley," Draco growled.

Hermione giggled. "Alpha hearing."

"Go to him," Harry urged and gently touched her shoulder. "Holding his hand for a few seconds won't give you bad luck."

Hermione nodded and crossed the room to stand behind the door. She reached out and held Draco's hand and an instant calm washed over her.

"Better?" Draco asked quietly.

"Much."

"Sorry for being an arse." He squeezed her hand tightly. "I should have been more thoughtful."

"No, I should have realised what was going on." Hermione found his wrist gland with her fingertip and she felt him relax. "I didn't know you thought I might change my mind."

"I always think you'll change your mind. You'll realise I'm a total twat and chase after my father."

Hermione laughed. "No, there's only one Malfoy for me." She took a breath and cast a spell to clean the mess she was sure her tears had made of her makeup, then pulled the door open. "My Alpha."

Draco's jaw dropped open.

The dress *had* fit perfectly. The vintage off-white satin sheath had been her dream. Simple, elegant, and absolutely zero frills. Narcissa and Hannah had both welled up when she stepped out of the dressing room, and the shop assistant flailed over her, speaking rapidly in a mixture of stilted English and Italian. The dress had apparently only been put on display that morning; it was meant to be.

And the expression on Draco's face was exactly what she had hoped for.

"I... I... wasn't... supposed..." Draco stammered.

"I don't care if you see me." She smoothed her hand over the lapel on his jacket. "Us both being calm is more important than anything else."

"You look..." His smile grew, lighting up his face and his eyes glowed a brilliant blue. "You look so beautiful."

"Thank you. And you look ready to be bound to me for eternity."

"Eternity doesn't seem long enough."

Ron chuckled in the background. "Alright you two, that's enough sappy shit. Go and wait, Malfoy. We'll bring her to you in a few."

"You're sure about this?" Draco touched her cheek.

"Absolutely. And you?"

"There's nothing I want more."

"Good. See you in a minute."

Draco nodded and gave her one last glance before closing the door. Hermione turned back to Ron and Harry, who were both grinning at her.

"That's sorted then." Ron held out his hand and she walked back over to them; they would be the ones to escort her to the ceremony.

Harry and Ron.

Her best friends.

Her chosen family.

"Bidh an ceangal seo gad cheangal ri chèile ann am beatha. Bidh thu mar aon le chèile, agus mar ann am beatha agus bàs cha tèid an ceangal a bhriseadh gu bràth."

The Valar witch smiled at them as she wrapped their joined hands in the silk tie that once belonged to Hermione's father. The witch had asked that the binding cloth be something of significance and Hermione had instantly known what it would be — the tie her father was wearing on the last day he remembered her. She wasn't sure why she remembered which tie he had been wearing that day, but she did. And when her parents had been moved away for their safety, she'd found the tie in a draw in her old home and kept it.

And now it was as if her father's own hand was holding hers while her life was entwined with the only other man she'd found on the planet she loved more than her dad..

"A-nis tha thu ceangailte aon ris an fhear eile. Le tie chan eil e furasta a bhriseadh. Gabh an uine ceangailteach, mus tèid na bòidean deireannach a dhèanamh, gus ionnsachadh na dh'fheumas tu a bhith eòlach - Gus fàs ann an gliocas agus ann an gaol. Gum bi do cheangal làidir. Gum mair do ghaol."

The entire ceremony had been in Gaelic; a Valar tradition, the witch had explained. A tradition that ensured an eternal bond. And while neither of them understood a single word, the sentiment delivered by the witch was clear.

The only words that would be in English would be their pledge and the official binding.

The Valar witch glanced around at the people surrounding them. Three circles of their family and friends. Friends who — as a part of the ceremony — had also vowed to be bound as family to the pair.

"Hermione, Draco. If you would share your pledge together."

They both nodded and locked eyes, their words in perfect harmony.

"You cannot possess me, for I belong to myself. But while we both wish it, I give you that which is mine to give. You cannot command me, for I am a free person. But I shall serve you in those ways you require. You are the star of each night. You are the brightness of every morning, the face of my sun, the harp of my music. I promise to honour you above all others. Our love is never-ending, and we will remain, forevermore, equals."

The Valar witch placed her hand over their joined ones, slowly unravelling the handfast. "May the gentle breeze bear witness to this ritual, and carry its message to all lands. May the sun warm their hearts, and its ever-burning fire fuel their desire for each other. May the water

provide for them from its bounty, and comfort their souls with its sounds. Your bond is sealed."

Draco didn't wait for the announcement of husband and wife. Not caring that they were surrounded by their family, he pulled Hermione to him and kissed her as if he hadn't done so for an age. It was heat and passion and hunger. The true Alpha male was seeking dominance, and this one time, she would allow it.

Magic burst around them in the night sky, twisting and curling, becoming one. They both looked up, smiling at the glow of the bronze of her magic and the cerulean of his. The entwined colours exploded in a sudden burst and floated down, spreading across the three circles of family that surrounded them. It wasn't the bolts of magic Hermione had learned about in Alpha-Omega bondings, but it felt like she was finally where she should be. Her own Alpha was quiet for the first time since it reared its head, and the sense of family protecting her seemed to curl around her and hold tightly.

Draco's arm tightened around her and a quiet growl rumbled in his throat. Hermione's breath caught; his eyes were the bluest she'd ever seen. And those eyes were fighting tears.

She touched his cheek, and without caring that everyone still surrounded them, she kissed him. She kissed him without caring about expectations of a sweet, small wedding-appropriate kiss. He was her mate, her husband, her Alpha, and she would kiss him however she wanted.

She slid her tongue against his the second his lips parted... once, twice, diving deeper with a tiny growl of her own. Draco pulled her flush against him, his mouth as needy and urgent as hers.

"How long do we have to stand here and watch this?" Ron grumbled good naturedly and Hermione laughed into Draco's mouth.

"We're done." Hermione pulled back and smiled at Draco. It was a smile that said they were only temporarily done and Draco winked knowingly at her.

"Finally," Harry said and swooped in and hugged her. Then there was chaos as everyone followed suit.

Hermione glanced quickly at the witch who had just bound them and she was nodding and smiling.

The family circles weren't broken as the pair were converged upon.

They were only made stronger.

*Bonding Ceremony words taken and combined from various traditional Celtic and Gaelic vows and pledges.

i. This tie will bind you together in life. You will be one with each other, and as in both life and death the bond shall never be broken

ii. Now you are bound one to the other

With a tie not easy to break.

Take the time of binding

Before the final vows are made

To learn what you need to know -

To grow in wisdom and love.

That your marriage will be strong

That your love will last

Apologies if I got the translations wrong, I had them checked but I'm sure there's some loss in translation.

Thanks, as always, for reading xx

Chapter 29

Hermione didn't have time to even look at where they were before Draco slammed her into the wall and landed his mouth on her throat. His hand gripped her breast, bunching the thin satin of her dress as he squeezed her roughly.

"I've wanted to fuck you so hard since I first saw you," he growled, his lips moving frantically over her neck, her jaw, and finally her mouth. His tongue pressed against her lips and she opened to allow him what he so desperately wanted.

And he devoured her.

His body held her firmly against the wall and she felt him growing hard, his thick length straining against his trousers and pressing into her stomach. His mouth never stopped, moving against hers in a hard desperation. Draco's hands reached for the skirt of her dress, tugging it unceremoniously up her legs and shoving it over her hips. He paused and pulled back to look at her when his hand found bare skin.

"You're naked?"

She grinned at him. "Not completely. I have had this dress on."

"Fucking hell, Granger!"

He slipped the spaghetti-thin straps down her arms exposing her naked breasts. Reaching behind her he unfastened the tiny button and lowered the short zipper. Hermione wiggled her hips and the dress floated to the floor.

Draco's eyes roamed slowly down her body, taking in every inch of her like he'd never seen her before. His fingertips drew a line from her collarbone, down between her breasts, stopping just below her navel.

"Your dress on your skin... how did it feel?" he murmured, dropping his eyes to where his hand was inching lower. "Did it slide across your skin?" He pressed his knuckle between her thighs. "Did it make you wet?" He dragged his finger slowly up and down her slick skin, grazing her clit before he pushed it inside her. "Did it feel this good?"

Hermione groaned and wrapped her leg around his. "Nothing feels as good as you."

"Good." He leaned down and whispered close to her ear. "Because tonight you're definitely going to feel me." He slid two fingers into her, pumping deeply. "I won't be gentle."

"I don't want gentle," Hermione groaned and slid her leg higher along his, needing his fingers even deeper.

Draco made a low noise deep in his throat and tilted his head down to suck on her pulse. One of Hermione's hands gripped his shoulder and the other slid into his hair, her deep sigh

mingling with his low growl.

"You're mine, Granger." His voice was low, heavy against her skin. "Mine. Do you understand that?"

Hermione smiled; Alpha Draco had come out to play.

"I'm yours, Alpha." She gripped his hair and yanked his head back. "All of me belongs to you. Show me how much you want me."

Draco growled again, his mouth returning to her throat and sucking hard. Twisting his fingers inside her, he pressed his thumb against her clit, the triple sensation drawing a sharp gasp from her.

"I'll show you, Darling." He added another finger, stretching her and making her breath catch once more. "You are the only one... my mate. My Alpha."

His fingers plunged deeply and she cried out, her head thumping onto his shoulder. He pumped harder and faster, his free arm sliding around her back, holding her up when her legs began to shake.

"Draco!"

His name was a sharp breath against his neck and she slumped forward, her body shuddering, her hands clutching at the back of his suit jacket. Draco pressed his face into her hair, breathing deeply.

Her scent had changed.

He'd expected the lilac, amber, and honey he'd become accustomed to. But there was something else. Something familiar.

Vanilla.

Argan.

The aromas she had told him she'd scented on him.

"Draco?" Hermione glanced up at him, her eyes the beautiful golden hue he loved above all others.

"Your scent is different."

"Ron and Harry? They escorted me."

Draco shook his head. "Vanilla and Argan."

"But... that's you."

Draco nodded; he was as shocked as she was.

She tugged the collar of his shirt open, leaning in and pressing her nose to his throat gland. He heard her deep inhale and the surprise hitch in her breath.

"Honey and amber..." Her eyes were wide when she looked back up at him. "How...?"

Draco shook his head. "I've no idea."

"The bonding?"

"Maybe." He smiled down at her. "Whatever it is, I love it. You're definitely mine now, Granger."

"And you're mine, Malfoy," Hermione laughed as he lifted her from the floor and carried her across the room, dumping her unceremoniously onto the bed.

"Stuck together, Granger." He kicked off his shoes and shrugged off his jacket before quickly shedding his shirt. "There's no getting out now"

She stretched her foot out and ran her toe along his thigh. "I'm not going anywhere, mister."

"Well, neither am I." He shoved his trousers and boxers down, kicking his feet free and lifting each foot to tug off his socks.

Hermione finally glanced around and she began to laugh. "Is this your old room?"

Draco crawled onto the bed beside her. "It is."

"Oh my God!" She rolled towards him, giggling. "You're using our bonding night to fulfill one of your teenage fantasies, aren't you?"

He didn't even flinch. "Yep."

"Draco!" She laughed harder. "This is wrong on so many levels!"

"Why?" He began to stroke his fingers over her hip.

"You slept here as a child! That's what's wrong with it."

"I slept here as a teenager." He dragged his fingers over her stomach, tracing a line upwards between her breasts stopping at her throat gland. "I also slept here when the Alpha changes first took hold."

"So, lots of solo performances in this bed then?"

Draco brushed his thumb over her nipple. "More than you can imagine."

"This is so weird," Hermione giggled and touched his cheek. "And after such a perfect evening."

The ceremony *had* been perfect. And the reception afterwards had been exactly what Hermione had wanted. Small and intimate. Just their family and friends.

Narcissa and Lucius had insisted they use the Manor gardens. And Hermione had agreed without hesitation. There had been too much outside interest in the first ever Alpha bonding that she knew there was nowhere else they could have the privacy she wanted. Wards had been set and cloaking charms over the entire estate ensured no overhead pictures could be taken.

And the gardens had been spectacular.

Daisies, tulips, bluebells and cornflowers has been magically set amongst the greenery. Hundreds of tiny stars floated above their heads, twinkling against the clear night sky and spreading a warm glow over the guests.

Lucius had stepped in for her father, dancing with her while everyone watched. It had been so sweet and touching, and his words to her had brought tears to her eyes.

"You truly are special, sweetheart." He winked at her. "If I wasn't so happily married, my son wouldn't have stood a chance."

Hermione laughed, "I don't think *I'd* stand a chance if Narcissa heard you saying that."

He laughed with her. "The Malfoy men chose wisely — strong women who keep them on their toes. My son is extremely fortunate you allowed him to win you over."

"He's very sweet when he's not being a total arse." She glanced over at Draco. "Plus, he's not too harsh on the eyes."

"Another proud Malfoy trait," Lucius replied. "And it's a great honour to welcome you into the Malfoy family."

"It's a great honour to be part of a family again."

"But you already had a family. Look around you," Lucius said. "Look at the family you've created."

Hermione scanned the people around her. The faces she saw were all smiling and laughing, and she realised the calmness she had felt after her earlier meltdown was a result of having a family around her.

Molly and Arthur were doting over Victoire and baby Dominique. Harry had his arm wrapped protectively around Pansy's waist as they spoke with one of Draco's cousins from France. Ron and Blaise were laughing with Neville and Hannah. Daphne and Ginny were listening politely to whatever Luna was telling them as she pointed at the sky.

And despite it being her wedding, the most heartwarming thing was seeing Narcissa and Andromeda talking non-stop, catching up on their lost years.

Then there was Draco.

He had hardly left her all night. His hands were touching her constantly, smoothing up and down her arms as they chatted with one person, caressing the back of her neck as they chatted

with the next. She'd been somewhat grateful for Lucius stepping in to dance with her; the possibility of Draco being stripped naked in front of everyone had been very real.

"Your family," Lucius said again. "One you should be very proud of. One who is honoured to have you as its guide."

Tears blurred the edges of her vision, and she dropped her gaze. She hadn't intended to turn her friends into family, but she couldn't have asked for anyone more perfect than the people who had pledged to be exactly that.

"Yes, everything *was* perfect," Draco agreed, pulling her back to the present. "And I don't want to make it less so. This might be my teenage fantasy, but you know we've both had more to drink than is safe to Apparate. And I'd rather not splinch you and spend tonight in St Mungo's watching you be put back together."

"Pfft, a likely excuse." Hermione reached between them and teased the hair on his navel. "You probably wanked with my face on your mind every night during the summer after the Yule Ball."

Draco gripped her wrists and rolled on top of her, pinning her arms over her head. "It wasn't just your face. Your tits played a major role—" he shifted between her thighs, grinding his erection against her wet skin "—as did your sweet little cunt."

"I'm glad I could ease those lonely nights for you."

He nuzzled her neck and she tilted her head, giving him access to her gland. "It was more than a teenage wank," he murmured. "It was everything I wished for with you."

"And did you get your wish?"

He notched himself against her entrance. "My wish was nothing compared to the real thing."

Lifting his head, his gaze stayed on hers as he entered her slowly, gliding into her until his knot pressed against her.

"No," she breathed. Her pulse picked up at the feel of him over her, the warmth of his skin on hers causing a hum of desire to crawl through her. "Not yet."

"I know," he whispered. "I won't. Not yet."

After his slamming her against the wall, she'd expected him to be frantic with her. Hard, fast fucking that would leave them both breathless and exhausted. But this was slow and sensual. He moved like fluid over her, his heavy body like an anchor, keeping her safe from the storm of the last few months.

He released her hands and leaned his elbows beside her head. Her breathing was already shallow, her heart pounding inside her chest.

"I love you so much," he said quietly. "Everything today... was so perfect... all of it..."

He kissed her; his lips were gentle, soft, so unlike his usual desperate, commanding kisses. His tongue flicked against hers, making her sigh. She wasn't sure what she'd expected, but it wasn't this. Wasn't the slow, sweet way he was touching her. Or the quiet murmurs against her lips

She didn't understand.

He was restrained, holding back, while she was losing herself in the scent of him, in the heat of his mouth, the feel of his skin.

She touched his face. "Draco?"

"Can you feel it?" He gazed down at her. "Can you feel...?"

"I don't understand."

His mouth left hers and trailed hot kisses down her jaw to the base of her throat. His tongue slid slowly across her gland and a bolt of magic shot through her.

"Oh!" she cried. "Draco... what...?"

Her body suddenly hummed with awareness, coming alive with the magic that had begun to flow through her. It was why he'd been going slow; he'd felt the same flow and was waiting for her to recognise it.

He slipped out of her, kissing his way down her body. His hand touched her stomach and trailed lightly down one hip to her thigh, tracing a lazy circle around the pulsing gland.

Draco glanced up at her and she reached down, carding her fingers through his hair. He pressed his thumb to her gland and another shot of magic flowed through her.

"Do you feel that?"

Hermione nodded, unable to form words. The magic was stronger than anything she'd ever felt.

"It's this gland." He pressed his nose into her thigh. "This is what makes you special."

He bit down, expecting to taste the metallic tang of their previous failed bondings. Instead, he tasted honey. The flavour of her skin. The golden hue of her eyes. He tasted *her*. *All* of her. And the sweetness spread across his tongue, dissolving like sugar, becoming a part of his very soul.

Hermione's cry was loud, her back arching, her magic exploding in the air above them. She reached for him and pulled him to her, her entire being thrumming with need. She kissed him. Hard. And his response was immediate. His hands travelled up her body, curving around her breasts, while his teeth grazed her lower lip. He kissed her with an intense hunger and his hands grew rougher in their touch.

She strained against him, her need was urgent, desperate, wanting to feel the explosion of magic again. She tilted her hips, searching for him, feeling the heavy length of him touching her core.

"Draco..."

"Look at me."

Hermione met his eyes and the aquamarine hue caused her to tremble beneath him; their connection was real, raw, and she felt his magic tingle as he pressed into her.

She trembled again, her orgasm already threatening to spill over. He withdrew almost completely from her, his thumb finding her thigh gland again, pressing down hard as he surged back into her.

Hermione moaned, her body tight, climbing higher and higher. Kissing her, Draco moved in and out of her in a steady rhythm, building each sensation. Her magic sparked beneath her skin, reaching for his.

"Let go," he demanded. "You need to let go."

And she did, shattering around him, her magic splintering and searching for his. She clutched at his shoulders, lifting her hips and chasing the sensation flowing through her. He quickly flipped them over, and even through her haze, she knew instantly what he needed.

Her mouth clamped down over his throat gland, her teeth digging into his flesh, and the sweet taste of vanilla exploded in her mouth. She moaned and his hips thrust up violently, his knot stretching her and locking within her body.

She came again, her body gripping him in waves. His own release was intense, a loud roar bursting from his chest and shaking the bed. She felt him pulse inside her, felt the heat of him fill her, their bodies becoming an endless extension of the other. The splinters of their magic joined, flowing between them, twisting and swirling, combining into a single force.

They were sweating, breathing heavily, their bodies and minds slowly coming down from the intense high. Draco rolled them over, holding his weight off her as best he could and Hermione opened her eyes. Her blurred vision slowly cleared and she was met with the same blue she saw at their ceremony.

Draco smiled down at her, smoothing her damp hair from her face and leaning in to press a gentle kiss to her lips.

"How did you know?" she asked.

"Take the time of binding. Before the final vows are made. To learn what you need to know. To grow in wisdom and love. That your marriage will be strong. That your love will last." He kissed her again. "The answer was in our vows."

"*That* was what she said?" Hermione asked and Draco nodded. "You understood her?"

"Aunt Andromeda translated it. She was probably the only one there who understood it."

"So how did that tell you to bite my thigh?"

"*Learn what you need to know*," he repeated. "It was the only thing we hadn't tried. The bonding ceremony set the magic in motion, I just needed to figure out what we hadn't tried."

Hermione smiled up at him. "You *did* figure it out. You're not just a pretty face."

"Rude." He yanked one of her curls and she laughed.

"We're bonded, Draco. Completely, utterly bonded. Nothing can ever tear us apart."

Draco sighed and dipped his head to press his forehead against hers. "You've no idea how long I've waited for you. Nothing *will ever* tear us apart."

"I like this," she whispered. "I like *us*."

Draco met her gaze. "This *is* us. This will always be us."

A popping sound woke them and Hermione lifted her head from Draco's chest to see what had caused the disturbance. She huffed a sleepy laugh; Keely was standing in the middle of the room, her eyes firmly closed.

"It's okay," Hermione croaked, then coughed to clear her throat. "Keely, it's okay. We're just sleeping."

The little elf slowly opened her eyes then smiled nervously. "Keely not wanting to disturb the new Malfoys."

Draco grunted and lifted his head. "Did Mother send you?"

"The mistress asked if Master Draco and Mistress Hermione wanted breakfast."

"Thank you, Keely," Hermione said politely. "Maybe in about half an hour."

Keely's ears twitched and a huge smile lit up her face. "Keely will tell the mistress."

She disappeared with another pop and Draco dropped his head back to the pillow, closing his eyes.

"Half an hour?" he groaned.

"That's plenty of time to shower and get dressed," Hermione replied.

"I wasn't planning on showering *or* getting dressed."

"Oh." Hermione giggled and curled back into his side. "But it would be rude of us to not go downstairs. You parents were kind enough to let us stay here."

Draco laughed. "Now that you're around, Mother would love nothing more than to have us move in here."

"As long as it's not this room."

He pinched her hip. "What's wrong with this room?"

She dropped her voice to a stage whisper. "Draco Malfoy wanked in this room."

Draco snorted. "My life will never be boring with you around, Granger."

"Nope," she agreed. "But we should eat. I'm a little lightheaded."

"Fine," Draco mumbled and sat up. "But fair warning, my Mother will be on a completely different tear now that we're married."

"Why's that?"

He stood and held out his hand, helping her from the bed. "She's desperate to become a grandmother."

Hermione's jaw dropped. "I don't... I'm not... it's been... one night!"

Draco pulled her flush against him. "She won't care. Be prepared for a plethora of baby hints."

"Maybe we should just Apparate home."

"But that would be terribly rude of us." He grinned down at her. "A shower then breakfast, *Malfoy*."

She scowled at him. "You're lucky I love you, *Granger*."

Draco laughed and lifted her into his arms. "Luckiest bastard alive."

Chapter 30

Draco sniffed the air as he exited the Floo. Something was... different. Spicy and fresh, but with an underlying aroma of scorched earth. He grinned; she was good at potion making, but it wasn't her forte. However, she'd been experimenting — trying to prove a point — and he could only imagine what she'd been up to while he'd been gone overnight.

"Darling, are you here?"

He was met with silence and he frowned. It was after seven and he assumed she'd be home. She'd not mentioned anything about staying late at the shop or going out with the girls.

Then his frown eased and another image caused him to smile. The red lace he'd given her as a one month anniversary gift. She'd yet to wear it for him, despite his not so subtle hints over the last few weeks.

He dropped his bag on the floor and loosened his tie, kicking his shoes off as he made his way to the stairs. He was sure she'd be laid out on the bed, a sultry smile on her face, her tits spilling out of the tiny bra.

His waistcoat hit the floor and he tugged his shirt from his trousers, unfastening the buttons at his wrists before pulling it over his head and dropping it on the stairs.

She'd be annoyed that his clothes were strewn across the house, but he didn't care. He wanted to be as near-naked as she would be when he stepped into the bedroom.

But much to his surprise, she wasn't there.

He sniffed the air again, the sweet scent was still in the air, but so was hers.

The shower, he thought with a grin. *Even better.*

He dropped his trousers to the floor, kicking them aside, and walked further down the hallway; the bathroom door was ajar but he couldn't hear any water running.

His frown returned. *What was going on?*

"Hermione?" He pushed the door open and found her sitting on the floor, wearing one of his t-shirts and a baggy pair of sweatpants.

She glanced up at him — her eyes were dark, her face pale and distressed.

"Hermione?" Draco dropped to his knees beside her, panic rising in him. He pressed his hand to her forehead. "What's happened?"

Her gaze never wavered as she grabbed something off the floor and handed it to him, whispering, "I'm pregnant."

Staring at what he assumed was a Muggle device, her words hit him like a bolt of lightning to the chest.

"But how?" he asked dumbly.

"I don't know." Hermione was on the verge of tears. "I've not missed taking a pill. I set an alarm to remind me each day."

"I know, I watch you take that every morning." Draco nodded towards the Muggle pills on the bathroom counter.

"I don't understand." Hermione shook her head. "It's not possible."

He waved the little plastic stick in the air. "I'm assuming this says otherwise?"

"It's a Muggle pregnancy test. And yes, it says I'm pregnant."

He grasped the device in his hand, a million emotions hitting him all at once.

She was right; this wasn't what they'd planned. They'd barely been bonded for six weeks. And her reaction clearly meant there was no mistaking it.

She was pregnant.

She was carrying their baby.

Their baby.

A tiny human they had made together.

He would be a father.

He would have a child who needed him.

To take care of it.

To teach it.

To love it without condition.

He wasn't sure he was ready.

He glanced at his hand; the piece of plastic was wrapped tightly in his grip. He didn't want to let it go. It was the most important thing he'd held since their hands were bound and their lives became one.

He was ready.

"I should have waited for you." She leaned her elbows on her knees and buried her face in her hands. "I should have waited, but I just couldn't."

"It's okay," Draco assured her, then asked carefully, "Why didn't you say something sooner?"

"Excuse me?"

"Why...*ah*...didn't you tell me you were... late?"

"I assumed you would notice!" She scrambled to her feet. "I assumed you would be aware I've not had a period considering there's been no days off in the bedroom!"

He frowned, realisation dawning on him. "When...?"

"It would have been on our bonding night! In *your* bedroom. Your fantasy night." She glared at him. "This is all your fault. You and your super Alpha sperm!"

Draco stared at her for a beat then the tension in him broke and he began to laugh. "Super Alpha sperm?"

She was still glaring at him, but her lips were twitching as she fought her own laughter.

"Do they wear little capes?" Draco was still laughing.

"Yes," she said, biting her lip. "And they think they're doing good things, but they're not!"

He lifted her from the floor, hugging her tightly. "I don't care if my super Alpha sperm danced the mambo, one of those guys did exactly what he was supposed to."

"You're not pissed about this?"

He tilted his head back to look at her. "I'm a little shocked, but why would I be pissed?"

"We never planned this," she explained. "And I'm assuming it's another ridiculous Alpha thing we knew nothing about."

"Getting pregnant the second we bonded?" he asked and she nodded. "Maybe, but I'm guessing it's only an Alpha duo thing. Alexander and Zahira have been bonded for a while and still don't have a child."

"So it *is* your super sperm?"

"I guess so." He kissed her and set her back down. "Should I apologise?"

She shrugged. "This is just... I guess I shouldn't be surprised; nothing about becoming an Alpha has made sense. So why should this be any different?"

Draco held out his hand. "Come with me."

"Where are we going?" She looked him up and down. "Because you're almost naked."

"That was another plan." He winked at her and dragged her out into the hallway. "Wait here a second."

He disappeared into the bedroom, reappearing half a minute later dressed similarly to her in sweatpants and a t-shirt. He took her hand again and led her down the stairs.

"Draco..."

"Be patient. I want to show you something."

He directed her to the backdoor, pulling her in front of him as he stopped to stand on the stoop.

"What do you see?"

She shot him a puzzled look over her shoulder. "Our garden,"

"Exactly. Our garden. And do you know what a garden needs?"

"Water? Sunshine? Fertiliser?"

"Smartarse." Draco nipped the side of her neck and she laughed.

"What? It's true."

"It is," he agreed. "But a garden also needs noise and fun and little feet running everywhere."

"Are we ready for little feet?"

"We'll need some play equipment; a slide, a swing, maybe a playhouse..."

She turned in his arms and smiled up at him. "You know that's not what I meant."

"I'm terrified," he answered. "What if this child is an Alpha and has to deal with all this crap? What if I'm a shit father? What if I drop the baby on its head the first time I hold it?"

"I'll probably drop it first," she said with a grimace. "I'm not ready for this, Draco. I know we said we wanted a family, but this is so fast."

"It is," he said and brushed her hair away from her face. "But as terrified as I am, I want this baby. More than anything, I want *our* baby."

"Yeah?"

He nodded. "Yeah."

"Well, don't start redoing our garden," she said and he frowned in question. "We'll have to buy a bigger house."

"A bigger house?"

"Yeah." She grinned at him. "To make room for everything your mother will buy."

Draco laughed and wrapped his arms around her waist, lifting her up. She curled her legs around him and he walked back inside.

"She'll be unbearable."

"The worst," Hermione agreed.

"She'll love this baby more than she loves us."

"Oh, she definitely will."

"We don't stand a chance." Draco lowered her to the couch, shifting to lie beside her and tucking his hand beneath her t-shirt, spreading his fingers over the warm skin on her belly. He swallowed thickly. "What must it feel like to be so loved before you even take your first breath?"

Hermione covered his hand with hers, tears welling in her eyes. "I think it feels exactly like this."

Chapter 31

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"I'm surprised the Floo didn't wake him," Hermione observed as Draco exited the fireplace.

"He didn't even flinch. He's too exhausted." Draco kissed the top of his son's head and smoothed his hand across his back.

"He's had a big day," Hermione said quietly. "Turning three is a big deal."

"It certainly is with the grandparents he has." Draco rolled his eyes and Hermione chuckled. "They spoil him worse than they did me."

"We really shouldn't have expected anything less." Hermione headed for the stairs. "I'm glad they offered to host, though. It was a lot less strenuous."

Draco followed her slowly up the stairs, his son a dead weight in his arms, sleeping soundly. His parents had gladly offered the Manor for his birthday — his mother far exceeding what was necessary — but it was late. And the excitement of his birthday and a day racing around the Manor gardens with James Potter and Lucy Weasley had worn Scorpius out completely. The three children had been born within months of each other and were thick as thieves. Draco already felt sympathy for the Hogwarts professors who would have to deal with them.

He laid Scorpius down gently in his bed, removing his son's shoes and grass-stained jeans, deciding it was easier to simply let Scorpius sleep in his t-shirt and shorts rather than wake him for pyjamas and have to deal with a tired tantrum. He pulled the covers over his son and stared at him for the millionth time since his birth. He was so much like his mother — with the exception of the dark-blond colour of his mop of curls — he was calm and inquisitive, curious, and intelligent beyond his young age.

And for the millionth time Draco gave thanks to whomever it was in the universe who saved his son from having the burden of being an Alpha. The relief both he and Hermione had felt when the healer announced that their son was simply a Beta — just a regular wizard — had been enormous.

He kissed his son's forehead then headed down the hallway to the master bedroom. Hermione was at the window, their daughter curled in a tiny ball against her shoulder. Hermione's hand rubbed gentle circles over the baby's back and she was humming quietly.

His daughter. His tiny, fragile daughter.

The next female Alpha.

She had no idea what her life would become and it terrified him.

"Stop worrying," Hermione said quietly.

Draco crossed the room, kissing Hermione and gently covering her hand on the baby's back. "I will worry about her until I'm dead and buried. I mean, what if she picks James Potter as her mate?"

"She'll pull him into line and he'll be a much better person for it."

He sighed and leaned in to press a soft kiss to the baby's head. She was just three weeks old and, every day of those three weeks, he had not stopped panicking. "It's just... how will she cope?"

"Better than I did," Hermione told him. "Fortunately for her, she will know and be prepared."

"But—"

"Draco, let's just enjoy her, okay? She won't be this tiny for long and worrying won't change anything." She carefully handed the baby to him. "Do you think you can stop panicking long enough for me to shower?"

Draco scowled at her, making her laugh. They'd had the same conversation almost every day since her birth, and every time Hermione told him the same thing — stop worrying.

But he couldn't.

This was his little girl. He'd watched Hermione deal with the effects of becoming an Alpha and he didn't want his daughter to have to go through the same.

And his guilt was the biggest part.

He'd been reluctant to have another child after Scorpius had been declared non-Alpha, but Hermione had been insistent that their son not be an only child. They both had been and she didn't want that for Scorpius. But when the charm had been performed in the minutes after her birth, and their newborn daughter declared an Alpha, his heart dropped.

It was his fault.

He was to blame for the life ahead of her.

Him.

He should have said no. Should have been more insistent in telling Hermione his fears for another child.

But...

Shifting the baby in his arms, he looked down at her and smiled. The heart-dropping moment in the minutes after her birth paled in comparison to seeing this beautiful angel every day.

She had his sharp features and the fine strands of blonde hair that covered her tiny head were dead straight — not a Granger curl in sight. And with the exception of her hating being swaddled tightly, she was an absolute dream.

He kicked off his shoes and sat on the bed, resting against the headboard. The baby hiccuped and her head jerked as Draco shifted her to lay on his bent legs. Her eyes blinked open and she peered around, her focus landing on him. He knew he was still probably just a blurred shape to her, but he liked to tell himself she knew what that shape was — her daddy.

Her little arm flailed in the air and Draco held his finger out, smiling as she gripped him tightly with her tiny fingers.

"You're so strong already, baby girl," he cooed at her. "And you need to stay strong and keep those nasty boys away from you."

She made an adorable little squeak, as if agreeing with him and he chuckled.

"That's right, Sabrina. Boys are nasty and when you grow up and you're an Alpha, you tell them all to sod off."

Sabrina. Her name had started as a joke between Hermione and Harry. But Draco had fallen in love with the name the instant Harry first mentioned it. It was so pretty, perfect for his angel, and it went well with Scorpius.

Hermione had thought him mad, explaining that Sabrina was a witch, not a real witch, a made up one. And a comedic one at that. But he didn't care. Hermione had chosen Scorpius for their son — he'd wanted him to be named Leo, which Draco had reminded her of often — and in the end, she had agreed. When the tiny, squirming baby had been placed on her chest just seconds after her birth, Hermione had nodded and whispered, '*Sabrina*.'

"And just remember, James Potter is only a friend. He's not someone you should ever think of as more."

"What are you telling her?" Hermione asked and shook her head.

"I'm just teaching her to be strong. And not listen to anyone named Potter."

"Don't listen to your daddy, Sabrina. He thinks just because he's an Alpha, he's in charge. You make your own choices."

"Shows how much you know." Draco lifted Sabrina's feet and kissed her sock-covered toes. "The littlest Alpha has been in charge since she was born."

"This is true." Hermione pulled the covers back and sat beside him, smiling at the baby. Sabrina turned her head towards Hermione's voice and instantly began to cry. Hermione took her from Draco, "You'd think I never feed her."

"Must be because you're so tasty." Draco winked at her and she slapped his arm.

"Inappropriate."

"But you are." Draco rolled off the bed with a laugh. "She's almost worse than Scorp was."

"No, she's not that bad... *yet*."

Their son, as a newborn, had the ability to know exactly where his mother was from the other side of the house. Scorpius would always refuse to take a bottle from anyone if Hermione was anywhere close by. And Sabrina looked to be inheriting her brother's skill set

"And get changed in the bathroom," Hermione eyed him closely as he draped his shirt over the arm of the chair by the window.

"Why's that?" He smirked at her, ignoring her demand and dropping his jeans to the floor. "You don't usually protest me undressing."

She glanced down at Sabrina, shifting uncomfortably, causing Draco to laugh.

"You seem to have forgotten I'm an Alpha. I scented you the second you stepped out the bathroom." Draco pulled his socks off and climbed under the covers. "And do I need to remind you it's only been three weeks and it's too soon?"

"No," she grumped. "But my stupid Alpha hormones are starting to go crazy."

"Well, your stupid Alpha hormones need to realise your body needs to heal." Draco kissed her cheek. "But in the meantime, you can do what you like to me."

"Yeah, dream on, buddy. I'm not blow—" she glanced down at Sabrina, whose eyes were closed, concentrating on the task at hand. She placed her hand over the baby's ear and hissed, "I'm not doing *that* when I get nothing in return."

"She has no idea what we're talking about."

"Maybe not, but I'm still *not* doing that until you can do it to me. You can suffer along with me."

"I've got hands," he smiled smugly. "I won't suffer."

"You're an—"

Scorpius appeared in the doorway, his eyes staring widely at them.

"Baby?" Hermione was surprised to see him standing there. He rarely woke once he was down for the night. She touched Draco's arm. "Draco—"

"I think he's still asleep," Draco said, watching his son carefully. "I think..."

Scorpius walked sleepily towards the bed, climbing slowly onto the padded bench at the foot, then crawling up to lay between them. His eyes closed the second his head hit Draco's pillow, a tiny snore sounding as he relaxed.

"That's new," Hermione laughed quietly, brushing his curls from his face.

Draco shifted him carefully and pulled the covers over him. "Looks like we're all in here tonight."

"It doesn't happen very often. We should enjoy it."

"Because he'll be eleven in no time and off to school?"

Hermione pressed her finger to his mouth. "Shh, don't say that. I'm not ready to even think about it."

"Hmm, kind of like me with her?" He nodded at their daughter.

"It's nothing like that. You're just ridiculous. I'm their mother."

Draco shook his head and lay down beside Scorpius. "Yeah, I'm the ridiculous one."

"You really are." She brushed her hand gently down Scorpius' back. "You're the most ridiculous man I've ever met."

"And yet, you still chose me."

"Like I had a choice." Hermione grinned down at him.

"And look at everything that choice brought you." He reached for her hand. "You got the family you wanted, and not just these two. You built a family to rival the Weasleys. A family who also chose you."

Hermione smiled at him, the golden hue in her eyes shining brightly. "I guess I made the right choice then."

He lifted her hand to his lips and kissed her palm. "And you've no idea how grateful I am that you chose me."



Chapter End Notes

*** A FEW WORDS OF THANKS ***

“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much” ~ Helen Keller

This fic came about with me asking two simple questions:

What if Hermione was an Alpha?

What if Draco was one as well?

Much research on female alphas in both the human and animal worlds followed, and with the crazy enthusiasm from my team, All That is Rare became a reality.

[coyg_81](#)

As always, you have been my craziest, most enthusiastic cheerleader. Thank you for all the time you've spent reading and commenting, and helping me stay on course. You make me laugh constantly and your use of British slang has more than once made tea come out my nose 😂

[PotionChemist](#)

My absolute terror of talking to someone new vanished the instant we started chatting. This story brought us together, and who knew what that would lead us to. Thank you for the hours of work you've put into this fic; translating my nonsensical spelling errors and bouncing ideas around with me.

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Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!